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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

SELLING THE BLOOMING FLOWER WAY:  
ISSUES OF EMPOWERMENT WITH BEAUTY AND WOMEN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTERS OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Appearance is a pervasive organizing principal in Western culture. It is, "along with his [her] sexual identity, the personal characteristic most obvious and accessible to others in social interaction" (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972:285). Attention to appearance is socially expected and is highly rewarded or chastised. For instance, most occupations demand attention to appearance (e.g., formal and informal dress codes in offices), and active social lives tend to center on it and nearly require it. Exploration of television, radio and print media illustrates this requirement. Attention to appearance is often displayed in these mediums as a means to an end--the end being a happier life, and increased social and self-worth. In a newspaper advertisement for Dr. Karr's Acne-Statín kit a woman states:

With Acne-Statín kit I can look at myself in the mirror again. Now I can simply enjoy life. I don't have to hide anymore. My self-esteem is back!<sup>1</sup>

Another print media advertisement geared toward weight loss for women notes that the correct appearance is key to getting attention. An advertisement for the BM program states:

Get the look that boys notice . . . those extra pounds that

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<sup>1</sup>*Shape*, January 1994.

make you ugly will go away fast! Do it now--before some other girl does and gets all the boys' attention.<sup>2</sup>

Many magazines, such as womens' fashion magazines, are dedicated solely to aiding the reader in obtaining a suitable appearance.

While examples can be found nearly anywhere to demonstrate the salience of appearance, the activity of consumers also demonstrates its social importance. Most significantly, the cosmetics industry is a ten billion dollar industry.<sup>3</sup> Related industries show similar trends: one and a half million Americans undergo 'aesthetic surgery' every year, thirty-three million dollars is spent each year by consumers on dieting and related services, and two hundred and fifty thousand women have fat liposuctioned from their bodies yearly.<sup>4</sup>

While this focus on appearance itself makes it a social topic worth exploring, the strong over representation of women as purchasers in the beauty and related industries invites a particular gender focus. The purchasing and use activity in the diet, cosmetics, and cosmetic surgery industries shows

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<sup>2</sup>*Sassy*, February 1994.

<sup>3</sup>Figure derived from research conducted by the Kline Company, cited in *Psychology Today*, "Skin Deep: Our national obsession with looks," May/June 1993:96.

<sup>4</sup>Figure derived from research conducted by Andrew Kimball at the Foundation of Economic Trends, cited in *Psychology Today*, "Skin Deep: Our national obsession with looks," May/June 1993:96.

radical gender imbalance. It appears that the concern with appearance and beauty play a much stronger role in the lives and identities of women than they do men. It is my contention that the overwhelming concern of women with appearance and beauty related issues prescribes the need for sociological research. Below, the details of previous research and a prescription for additional research are explored.

Much theoretical analysis has been done on past and current images of beauty and women. Previous research has mainly focused on the representations of beauty and women. These areas of study of beauty and women include textbooks, children's books, art, and advertisements (examples include: Barthel 1988; Bordo 1993; Grauerholz and Pescosolido 1989; Goffman 1979; Ferree and Hall 1990; Fox 1990). Additionally, theoretical and statistical research has been conducted in areas considered to be related to images of beauty such as anorexia, bulimia and the diet industry. These related issues have been said to be directly linked to the images and messages of beauty made for women in the Western culture (Bordo 1993; Chernin 1981; Lakoff and Scherr 1984; Orbach 1978; Wolf 1991). Most of the literature from this research uses as its base the claim that beauty is destructive and disempowering, as it teaches women that they are valued as objects of adornment, that they are defective, and that their self-worth and social worth should be based on their appearance. The sociological analysis of beauty images have

been used to verify these claims. What is largely lacking in this literature are the actual experiences of individual women. What beauty *means for women* and how it plays out in their lives is nearly absent from the research and literature.

Everyday experience of women and beauty is an essential addition to the beauty research for several reasons. First, this study will give the research a sense of wholeness. Most of the analysis of the impact of beauty on women has been derived from examining images or related industries. These types of research have focused on the potential effects of the focus on beauty for women or relies on inferences surrounding the role and impact of beauty on women. While this type of research draws interesting and thought provoking conclusions, the everyday experiences of women and beauty have the ability to solidify or refute these findings. In this way, the everyday experiences of women can then give some of the existing analysis and linkages a stronger basis for validity.

Qualitative research based upon the lives of real women's experiences is a better way to examine how beauty is linked to empowerment or disempowerment for women. That is, beauty and empowerment are not facts that can be measured and studied in a positivistic fashion. Beauty holds personal and social meaning for women and means different things for different people in different contexts. In order to understand the meaning behind the issues of beauty it is necessary to locate oneself *inside* a site in which those issues are a key focus.



Once inside a site, beauty and its relationship with women can be examined by observing and interviewing those in the arena in which beauty is the primary focus.

In order to facilitate the exploration of meaning of beauty and its supposed tie to issues of empowerment and disempowerment, I chose to study a direct selling cosmetic company called Blooming Flower Cosmetics.<sup>5</sup> This experience provided an inductive analysis that serves to supplement the deductive analysis accomplished in the area of beauty. Additionally, this direct connection to the "naturalistic" expression of beauty and how it is sold by women to women has allowed me to explore a unique meaning of beauty. The use of qualitative methods such as participant observation and interviews with Blooming Flower Cosmetics consultants shows how the concepts of beauty and empowerment or disempowerment take on real human meaning. Interviews allowed the clarification and detail to emerge on key issues surrounding the workings of Blooming Flower and issues of beauty and empowerment. Additionally, this qualitative approach gave a voice to an issue and a group of people that have been largely absent in sociology.

Studying issues of empowerment requires a definition with which to analyze women's experiences. During this research

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<sup>5</sup>A pseudonym has been used to protect the anonymity of the company and the people who work in it. Additionally, pseudonyms are used with all Blooming Flower workers so that anonymity can be protected. Pseudonyms are also used with published works associated with Blooming Flower.

project empowerment was considered to exist if opportunities and experiences not otherwise present existed that impacted women personally or as a social group in a positive way. For example, instances of pride or increased personal or social power would be recognized as empowerment. Concomitantly, instances of heightened insecurity or feelings of failure would be categorized as disempowerment. Repeated exposure to key Blooming Flower events allowed for overall conclusions to be made concerning issues of empowerment and/or disempowerment.

#### Blooming Flower Cosmetics--The Basics

Blooming Flower Cosmetics has been in the direct selling beauty business since the early 1960s. The founder had been working for a direct selling company which, according to my key informant, Judy, complained of her 'thinking like a woman.' Feeling like she knew women and their specific needs, she started her own direct selling company--Blooming Flower Cosmetics. Her dream was to "build a company where women would have the opportunity to reach their own potential and the flexibility to develop at their own pace."<sup>6</sup> And the company has in fact given thousands of women the opportunity to do just that. According to the literature, there are over 200,000 Blooming Flower beauty consultants worldwide, with more than 3,000 directors and over 75 national sales

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<sup>6</sup>Beauty (pseud.). 1992. Chicago: Victory Books (pseud.), 2.

directors.<sup>7</sup> The company's claim to fame is that they are not only a Fortune 500 company several years in the running, but they have more women making over \$100,000 per year than any other company. Additionally, they have made more women millionaires than any other United States company.<sup>8</sup> The company's estimated sales for 1993 were \$520 million.<sup>9</sup>

Blooming Flower works out of some key tenets that began with the founder and have stayed on to fully shape the Blooming Flower company. One key tenet focuses on the definition of beauty. The founder believes that beauty is both an inner trait and an outer trait. She states: "Beauty is illusory. You communicate it not only by your appearance, but also by your manner and vitality, your sense of confidence and style."<sup>10</sup> With this she states the goal of Blooming Flower: "to help women bring the beauty they have inside, outside."<sup>11</sup>

Beauty is a concern that Blooming Flower sees as central to women: "We all think about being beautiful. Women always

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<sup>7</sup>See *Multi-level Marketing: The Definitive Guide to America's Top MLM Companies*. 1994. Fort Worth: The Summit Group, Pp. 80-3; and Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 1 March 1994.

<sup>8</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 1 March 1994.

<sup>9</sup>See *Multi-level Marketing: The Definitive Guide to America's Top MLM Companies*. 1994. Fort Worth: The Summit Group, Pp. 80-3.

<sup>10</sup>*Beauty*, 2.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

have, and no doubt always will. The urge to be beautiful is part of what makes us human."<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, it is a contention with Blooming Flower's consultants that any woman has it in her to be beautiful. Coming from this perspective, people who work within Blooming Flower believe that in order to achieve beauty, an effective beauty plan with correct skin care formulas and glamour shades are essential. It is this basic premise that provides the organization of Blooming Flower Cosmetics.

Most of the cosmetic companies in this country distribute cosmetics to a drug store or department store and leave consultation and application techniques up to the consumer to figure out. Feeling that this is not enough, it is Blooming Flower's objective to help women achieve beauty by becoming personal beauty consultants to their customers. Besides providing the product, the consultants also hold demonstrations in the form of skin care and glamour classes, individual facials, computerized beauty analyses, and personal and group consultations in customer's homes. They willingly offer any additional help to the women according to her needs in maintaining her beauty. In fact, it is this that one sales associate, Judy, claims is largely responsible for Blooming Flower's success with its customers. Judy points out that Blooming Flower has "a real high standard on customer

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 4.

service."<sup>13</sup>

The structure of Blooming Flower is such that each consultant has a director that provides training, support and company information at weekly meetings. The consultants also receive training at conferences and large scale company events that exist to provide additional knowledge for the consultant. By learning how to effectively recruit and sell, the consultant has the tools to begin her climb to the top.

Blooming Flower is unique in the cosmetics market in that the consultants make a living on commission; The consultant does not receive a salary. Instead, Blooming Flower consultants purchase the products at a wholesale price from the company and resell the products for a retail price that carries a 50% markup set by the company. It is the dollar amount of products ordered from the company and the number of people the consultant recruits into Blooming Flower (to become consultants) that earns the consultant a chance for more money, advancement and prizes. For example, to become a director, a consultant must have recruited thirty people who then become active beauty consultants. These recruits form her unit who she motivates and trains to sell and recruit. Her unit then must achieve a unit production of \$16,000 in four months in order for her to become a director. As a director she earns a certain percentage of the amount of

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<sup>13</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

product that her unit orders from the company monthly, with the percentage depending on how many recruits order each month.<sup>14</sup>

Other positions exist between beauty consultant and director such as star consultant, recruiter, star recruiter and team leader. At each level the consultant is rewarded either with specific prizes such as jewelry (generally symbolizing a certain position within the company), or the chance to earn certain percentages of their recruits sales. For example, the star recruiter (one who has three to four active recruits) earns 4% commission off of her recruits' purchases. Additionally, the higher one climbs on the Blooming Flower ladder, the greater the privilege. These privileges include the chance to wear certain designated Blooming Flower professional clothing, and the option of attending specific classes and seminars.

There are no rules or quotas in Blooming Flower. That is, the consultants are fully on their own in determining how much they want to work. The director holds meetings weekly with her unit to motivate, train and inform the consultants. The more motivated the director can get her recruits to be, the more money to be had by the director, the consultant and the company. As Judy sees it "the whole concept is a win,

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<sup>14</sup>It is important to note that the percentages earned are paid out from the company's funds, and are not taken out of the recruit's monies. This differentiates Blooming Flower from 'pyramid' companies such as Amway.

win, win, everyone gets to win."<sup>15</sup>

### Overview

This paper covers my experiences and interpretation of a five month qualitative study with Blooming Flower Cosmetics. To facilitate the interpretations of the study I present a literature review of the research that exists concerning beauty, appearance and women. This literature review gives shape to the questions and issues that guided my exploration of the substantive area of beauty. Additionally, it provides a discussion on the tenets of the disempowerment issue with beauty and women. The issues raised in the literature will illustrate this study's importance.

Following the literature review, I lay the foundation for my research by presenting a discussion on the methods of research and analysis, the setting, the informants, and the theoretical framework used in this study. This chapter elaborates on the processes of selling cosmetics and training the beauty consultants in the Blooming Flower company. Discussion of the setting and everyday events at Blooming Flower provide necessary detail on the environment in which beauty and issues of empowerment and/or disempowerment are defined and are played out. These details will lay the groundwork for discussion of the empowerment/disempowerment issues involved with Blooming Flower cosmetics and the women

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<sup>15</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

within it.

Next, I present the remainder of my analysis in two chapters. These chapters put the Blooming Flower experience within the context of empowerment, exploring both the perspectives of the women within Blooming Flower, and the link with the literature. Analysis of specific definitions of beauty and techniques used by Blooming Flower and its consultants provide windows through which the relationship between beauty and issues of empowerment are examined. How the Blooming Flower experience impacts womens' lives both personally and in relation to other work and home experiences will also be highlighted.

Finally, I sum up the findings of the project with conclusions concerning beauty and empowerment within the context of this study. This summation will explore how this study contributes to the existing research, what sociological importance this study holds, and how this study adds to conclusions surrounding women as a social group and their interactions with beauty.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Beauty is considered to be directly tied to femininity (Freedman 1986). That is, to be beautiful is to be considered womanly. In fact, the Random House dictionary incorporates women into its definition of beauty: 2. "A beautiful person, especially a woman". But, Freedman notes that the opposite is also true, "to be unattractive is to be unwomanly" (Freedman 1986: 2). She notes, "beauty is a prerequisite for femininity and only incidental to masculinity" (1986:2). The idea that beauty is a prerequisite for womanhood has been perceived as problematic for the researchers studying beauty. Below I explore the problematic nature of beauty.

Researchers note that the images and the treatment of women in this culture operate from the premise that 'looking good' is imperative for women. Lakoff and Scherr (1984) point out that women are sent cultural messages throughout their lives emphasizing the importance of appearance. These messages are ubiquitous in nature, spanning all media forms, family experiences, peers, and schooling experiences. More specifically, key roles of female figures in fairy tales have centered around and emphasized the importance of appearance for women. For example, the criteria by which Cinderella and

her step sisters were valued was appearance. Out of jealousy of Cinderella's beauty, the 'ugly' step sisters punished her. At the ball, however, Cinderella's beauty finally got her what she deserved and everyone else wanted, to be desired by the prince. In the end the beautiful get the best, Cinderella got the Prince. Other fairy tales present women as beauty focused as well. For instance, the witch in Snow White spent hours staring in the mirror worrying over her appearance. In these stories and other cultural images there is an "implicit assumption that beauty is of paramount importance, that its possession whether by a woman herself or for a male through the possession of such a woman is of more value than anything else, worth more than power, wealth, or fame" (Lakoff and Scherr 1984:3). Researchers note that cultural messages exist, such as stories like Cinderella, which set the precedent that to be ugly is bad, but to be beautiful is good, which drive the search for beauty and/or goodness (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972; Hatfield and Sprecher 1986; Lakoff and Scherr 1984; Pogrebin, 1983; Weibel 1977).

The importance of appearance put forth from images and how women's appearance is rewarded or chastised has some serious consequences, according to the researchers. To begin with, women learn to define and value themselves according to how they fit into the cultures current definition of beauty. Barthel (1988) contends that women articulate their social identities through their bodies via physical appearance. This

attachment to a self-definition based on appearance results in self-esteem that is largely determined by the reaction and approval of others (Foltyn 1990; Weibel 1977). This method of self definition is considered to be problematic because women rely on others for validation which produces an element of insecurity based on whether she is considered beautiful or not. Foltyn (1990) identified the link between self-esteem and beauty in her study of beautiful women. She notes, "The woman who transforms herself into a beauty expects to transcend feelings of inadequacy. The woman who dedicates herself to transforming her looks, usually wants to transform her life as well" (1990:167).

With self-esteem for women being largely based on appearance, products and procedures become key to transforming and maintaining self-esteem. Often a dependency results. Foltyn (1990) notes that the use of beautifying products was key to the transformation of personal worth. She found that "women who 'engineered' their beauty, did so with specific goals in mind--to be more popular, ward off rejection from peers, get attention of boys, and boost their self-esteem" (1990:274). This link to self-esteem was found by Dull and West (1991) in their study of cosmetic surgery. They found that cosmetic surgery is considered legitimate by surgeons only when it was desired for reasons pertaining to self-esteem. Good candidates according to the surgeons that Dull and West studied were those looking to increase self-esteem

and improve self image (1991:60).

Even more problematic for many researchers is that how women are treated throughout society often revolves around how they appear on the outside. Beauty for women "is constantly anticipated, encouraged, sought and rewarded in a wide range of situations" (Freedman 1986:10). That is, a woman's social and often personal value is correlated with her level of attractiveness (Bordo 1993; Chapkis 1986). Hatfield and Sprecher (1986) in their book *Mirror, Mirror...The Importance of Looks in Everyday Life* name countless studies in which appearance is rewarded. These rewards for beauty are apparent in nearly every aspect of social life. For example, some studies show that the level of attractiveness is positively correlated with grades (i.e., the more attractive, the higher the grades) (Felson 1980; Lerner and Lerner 1977; Salvia, Algozzine, and Sheare 1977; Singer 1964; Landy and Sigall 1974 in Hatfield and Sprecher 1986:47). Dipboye, Arvey and Terpstra (1977), found that the more attractive one is, the more money one earns (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986:62). More specifically, success or failure socially and financially for women is attributable to one's beauty (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Chapkis 1986; Freedman 1986; Wolf 1991). Beauty has been used to judge job performance and ability, and has been used in court to justify rape and job dismissal (Wolf 1991). For example, in her book *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf recounts how ex-anchorwoman Christine Craft was fired by a Kansas City

television station because she was "too old, too unattractive, and not deferential to men" (1991:35). This gives meaning to the claim that "beauty is not only expected but heavily rewarded" (Freedman 1986:4). Additionally, the courts have ruled that aspects of female appearance could be used in deciding whether sexual harassment was "welcome" (*Vinson v. Meritor Savings Bank*), that a partnership at Price-Waterhouse necessitated a woman to "'walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely,' and 'wear make-up'" (*Hopkins v. Price-Waterhouse*), and that an employer can avoid hiring women for higher-paid work based on the idea that the work was dirty and "would ruin their looks" (*Jerimiah v. Ministry of Defense*) (Wolf 1991:39-40). It is from examples such as these that allow researchers theorize that beauty is a form of social control as it often dictates the lives of women (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Chapkis 1986; Freedman 1986; Sichtermann 1986; Wolf 1991).

Freedman (1986) notes that the beautiful get ahead faster socially, politically and economically. A television advertisement used by Bordo demonstrates the use of this message in daily life. The ad portrays actress Heather Locklear working out at a Bally Matrix Fitness Centre. She says "You exercise, you diet, and you can do anything you want" (1993:195). Yet, Bartky notes that obtaining beauty gains women "attention and some admiration but little real respect and rarely any social power" (1990:73). This lack of

social power is what researchers in beauty tend to focus on and is at the heart of the contention that beauty is disempowering. A discussion of this contention is laid out below.

In order to fully examine the key points concerning the disempowerment of women surrounding beauty in the literature it is helpful and essential to focus on the most pervasive message sent to women concerning beauty: 'Every woman can be beautiful.' According to researchers this message has serious implications for women, appearance and power.

First, this message presupposes that beauty for women has a specific singular definition. In our culture for the last few decades female beauty had been defined as white, narrow hiped, high breasted, extremely thin, muscle sans flab, hairless body, 'evenly' proportioned body and facial features, straight white teeth, and a tall body (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Chapkis 1986; Kilbourn 1979, 1987; Wolf 1991). Kilbourn notes the absolute flawlessness that is represented in advertisements and expected from women--"no wrinkles, no scars, no blemishes, and no pores" (1979). The ideal is determined to be dangerous in this sense because types of female beauty become defined as right or wrong, good or bad. Subsequently, only some can obtain the "right" type of women's beauty, thus it has an exclusionary function. That is, the ideal beauty is a representation of one type of woman and, hence, labels a multitude of shapes and sizes, as not

beautiful or wrong.

By defining certain women's bodies or faces as ideal and others as less ideal, certain bodily features become defined as problematic. Dull and West (1991) found this to be true in their study of the gendering of cosmetic surgery. In their study they found that certain ethnically-linked nose shapes were constructed as problematic by the surgeons and the patients because they did not fit the culturally accepted and expected conceptions of what a beautiful nose was: "surgeons and former patients only specified 'problems' with racial and ethnic features in the marked case: in the case of individuals who were not white, Anglo Saxon, and protestant" (1991:59). Not surprisingly, the definition of cosmetic surgery as a 'normal' and a 'natural' activity hinged upon formulating specific features as "objectively 'problematic'" (1991:57). Bordo emphasizes this problematizing as well, noting that in advertisements the female body is constructed as "the alien attacker" (1993:189). She dictates that "a violent assault on the enemy is usually required: bulges must be 'attacked', and 'destroyed,' fat 'burned,' and stomachs (or, more disgustedly, 'guts') must be 'busted' and 'eliminated'" (1993:189). Advertisements also participate in defining women's facial features as problematic as demonstrated by Chapkis (1986) in an ad for Merle Norman cosmetics:

Problems: My eyes look pale and washed out. My nose is too wide at the bottom. Can you show me what to do so my

lips don't look so thin? How can I soften the line of my pointy chin?

Solution: Merle Norman personalized skin care and make-up (6).

The process of aging is especially problematized for women. Chapkis, in her discussion of the two types of 'attractive' women that exist, notes that the second, the 'over-forties' woman's (Jane Fonda and Racquel Welch) "most striking quality is their apparent youth" (1986:10). Portraying the 'over forties' woman as continually striving for a younger body by engaging in energetic exercise suggests that the woman who leaves her older body unattended is undisciplined and guilty of excessive laziness. Also indicative of this problematizing of age is the enormous amount of advertisements for wrinkle creams that claim to maintain a youthful look by avoiding signs of aging. By implication, the ads are defining age and its effects as problematic and in need of fixing. These ads and products exist nearly solely for women and not for men.

Problematizing the body is criticized by researchers because it results in an often endless pursuit of 'fixing' the problematized body parts or facial features. Gilday (1985) describes the level of intensity that often characterizes this pursuit. In her view, women seek "improvement of their bodies with desperate intensity as if this one task represented their one true vocation; as if their very lives depended on it." One respondent in Foltyn's study demonstrates this active pursuit in her description of her quest for the correct nose



(1990:161):

When I had it [cosmetic surgery] done the first time, I remember lying in the hospital bed and thinking, 'This is the worst, most protracted pain I have ever endured--there is no way I would choose to do it again.' But now, my nose isn't good enough and I wonder, 'What's 24 hours of pain, anyway? It's nothing.' The benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

The process of defining certain features as problematic is considered damaging because it exacerbates the insecurities women have concerning their bodies and appearance, and encourages self-hatred. One result of idealizing certain looks or facial features is that identity can become problematic and contingent upon being able to grasp the specific look considered to be beautiful. Foltyn (1990) found this to be true in her study of beautiful women. She notes:

If you are recognized as a beauty only after you have made yourself up, undergone plastic surgery, or when a makeup artist and hairstylist 'create' you, the tendency is to feel highly insecure about your appearance, your social identity as a beautiful woman, and feel if your 'subterfuge' were to be exposed, others would discover that you have only been masquerading as a beautiful woman--an imposter (161).

Researchers have also noted that the photographic images of women that are found in print media are misleading. That is, they tend to be literally impossible to emulate because they are machine-made images. Wolf (1991) refers to "Computer imaging" a controversial technique that is used on images of models and women in general to slim waists, hips and thighs, make busts fuller and remove wrinkles, scars and blemishes, or in other words, create an ideal (83). This, according to Wolf, leaves the reader with an image that is unobtainable

because the image is machine made and the body which once existed is altered, often dramatically, to incorporate the dimensions and features of the current ideal. She points out that not only is this image unobtainable, but it is also, in a sense, false advertising in that women are not told that the image has been altered and no longer represents how that specific woman actually appears. I have found this to be the case with the women with whom I have spoken. Not many know that the machine exists and that the images are altered. The danger here is that women may try and pursue this beauty, going to extremes in an attempt to emulate the preferred type of beauty. Studies concerning body image often highlights the dangers of imaging a thin ideal for women. For instance, seventy-five percent of thirty-three thousand women who participated in a 1984 *Glamour* magazine survey reported thinking that they were overweight when actually only twenty-five percent were medically overweight. Additionally, forty-five percent of the underweight women in the study felt they were overweight (Wolf 1991:185). Statistics such as these are often used to link the high incidence of eating disorders among women to the extreme focus on thinness and appearance for women in our culture.

Secondly, the message that 'every woman can be beautiful' assumes that women want to be identified as consumed by the pursuit of beauty, and ultimately want to be seen an object to be judged and rewarded for her ability to attain that beauty.

Freedman notes that events such as beauty pageants reinforce an attitude that the woman is "a passive decorative object" (1986:vii). Magazines such as *Playboy* have this same effect. In *Playboy* women are shown lying still (passive) for the camera and the readers so that they can examine, evaluate, and continue to define women as decorative objects. This desire for objectification is apparent by examining womens' roles in advertisements as well. In a study done by Carpenter (1993), roles that women were portrayed in advertisements were examined. She found that the most pervasive role for women was one of decoration and beautification. More specifically, highly attractive women are used to sell everything from cars to vacations, from beer to sports magazines (see appendix 3). In fact, the swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated* magazine is the highest seller of all the *Sports Illustrated* issues (Foltyn 1989).

The message that 'Every woman can be beautiful' and the roles of women portrayed in advertisements exacerbate and perpetuate the extreme importance and subsequent focus on appearance for women. An example of this objectification was offered by Barthel (1988). She quotes a panty hose advertisement--"Ladies with L'eggs have choices . . . the more you choose L'eggs, the more you get chosen" (1988:65). Besides the underlying message that nice legs will earn a woman success or a man, these advertisements, like many others, represent women as objects to be 'chosen' because

specific body parts are considered to be attractive. Pogrebin (1983) describes this objectification by reiterating the common assumption in our society: "with a woman, what you see is what you get, because she is presumed to be putting forward all the charms in her arsenal at all times" (78). This objectification and emphasis on women as objects of adornment is declared damaging by researchers because it reemphasizes and perpetuates the theme that women should seek approval from others via appearance and that attainment of a beautiful appearance is what a woman needs to succeed. Additionally, it sends the message that women should base how they feel about themselves on how they match up to the current beauty ideal. These messages create an identity in women which associates self and social worth largely based on how they appear on the outside.

Lastly, the message that 'Every woman can be beautiful' suggests that women aren't beautiful to begin with, that they must **do something** to **become** beautiful. That is, it implies that women are in some sense incomplete without using the prescribed cultural methods of beauty, i.e., make-up, diet, and exercise (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Chapkis 1986; Freedman 1986; Kilbourn 1979, 1987; Wolf 1991). Make-up, according to Bartky, is "the art of disguise, but this presupposes that a woman's face, unpainted is defective" (1990:71). Chapkis uses the idea of the non made up face as problematic to describe this deficiency theme: "Even more public acts of femininity,

like applying make-up, tend to rely on an underlying message of female inadequacy. There is a problem to be corrected, a basic improvement to be made" (1986:6). This theme of 'woman as defective' often leads to the development of insecurities within women. As Kilbourn puts it, the message from cultural images, particularly advertisements, says "We will not do as we are . . . we must transform" (Kilbourn 1979, 1987).

Researchers emphasize that this message along with the assumption that 'all women can be beautiful' leads to self-blame if beauty is not achieved (Barthel 1988; Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Chapkis 1986; Kilbourn 1979, 1987). Barthel (1988) notes that the implication exists that if women do not succeed in becoming rich, becoming beautiful, and becoming happy, it is not the fault of the product; rather, it is the fault of the women themselves for not living up to the advertisement. Advertising and women's magazines with their blatant focus on 'improving' women's appearances are argued to play off of, create and focus on feelings that women may have of guilt and inadequacy (Barthel 1988; Bordo 1993; Kilbourn 1979, 1987; Wolf 1991). Not following the steps laid out to achieve beauty translates to mean that "'a woman who lets herself go'. . . only has herself to blame" (Chapkis 1986:10). But, Bartky contends that the striving for the standard put forth in our culture is so stringent that it is a "set-up" (1990:72). She asserts that "it requires such radical and extensive measures of bodily transformation that virtually

every woman who gives herself to it is destined in some degree to fail" (1990:72).

Weibel (1977) argues that advertisers intensify this self-blame by representing women as insecure and in need of male approval. Weibel notes that ads, by presenting women posing, dressed, and made up, suggest a need for approval. It is this male heterosexual approval that Weibel says cosmetic companies play off of--'the fear of not being approved of' (Weibel 1977:163). An advertisement presented by Barthel highlights this assertion--'Gentlemen prefer Hanes'--to be read 'Wear Hanes and you will be approved of [by men]' (1988:65). It is through these messages of deficiency and need of approval that the definition of women as beauty conscious beings becomes normalized. As Bordo points out the 'developed body' "becomes a symbol of correct *attitude*; it means that one "cares" about oneself and how one appears to others" (1993:195).

Also found to be problematic and disempowering concerning beauty and women is that the definition of beauty is largely in the hands of the fashion industry and the cosmetic industry. Women's magazines, controlled by the advertisers of these industries, are forced to follow the conception of beauty developed by these advertisers. That is, advertising is necessary as it is the economic lifeline of the magazines. Subsequently, beauty images portrayed by the magazine itself that contradict the advertised products promises may hinder

sales and cause the advertiser to withdraw the account from the magazine that is portraying these images. If enough accounts are lost, the magazine may cease to function. Consequently, these magazines tend to aid in the definition of beauty by giving steps and guidelines on how to achieve this beauty. Given that most women have learned to define themselves by their achievement in the beauty arena, these steps and guidelines are fully welcomed as they are perceived as an avenue to success. Unfortunately, Wolf notes, this results in women's magazines over-focusing on "readers' anxieties on the scale and the mirror, at the expense of the wide world of women" (1991:2-3).

Finally, beauty is said to be disempowering because it helps perpetuate the gender hierarchy (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Sichtermann 1986; Wolf 1991). Those who control the images of beauty and, in a sense, create the image of the ideal woman (those in the fashion, cosmetic and women's magazine industries) are largely men. Additionally, the reliance of beauty on validation is generally played out in this society as women seeking validation from men, thus the power of validation is in men's hands. Researchers contend that this has always been a source of social power for men. Bordo (1993) notes that the historical social manipulation of the female body is key to maintaining power relations. Dull and West conclude from their study of cosmetic surgery that "surgeons uphold normative attitudes and activities for

particular sex categories and, hence, become co-participants in the accomplishment of gender. In addition, surgeons act as technological facilitators of gender's accomplishment and as cultural gatekeepers in the fine tuning of gender's presentation" (1991:68). Wolf chooses more blunt, structural terms to talk of this hierarchy: "'Beauty' today is what the female orgasm used to be: something given to women by men, if they submitted to their feminine role and were lucky" (1991:173).

In sum, these researchers find beauty to be a disempowering experience because the focus and importance placed on beauty results in a conception of women as an object of 'adornment.' Women's social and personal identity are defined in terms of their ability to embody the cultural ideal of beauty. The singular or narrow definition what beauty is considered to be teaches young girls and women that they are deficient and in need of transformation. All of this is said to lead to a sense of insecurity that generally leaves women in a disempowered position. Beauty is declared disempowering because the definition of beauty is largely out of the control of the people it affects--women. Women for the most part are not active in the creation of the definition of and images of beauty. Nor, are they able to decide the criterion by which they are socially valued. Pogrebin sums up the effects that beauty has on women: "[H]ow unnecessary the suffering is: for both sexes, the sense of inadequacy, the rejection; for



all women, the objectification and internalized shame; for minority women, the pressure to meet a beauty standard defined by the white majority; for beautiful women, the built-in obsolescence of aging; for moderately attractive women, the needless suffering of not feeling 'beautiful enough'; and for plain women, the fear of being unlovable and unloved" (1983:109).

In Chapter 3 I explore how this study was organized. This discussion on organization includes the theoretical perspective I utilized, my role as a graduate student researcher including a discussion on 'getting in', and an explanation of the general processes of Blooming Flower that I observed and relied upon for my analysis. A discussion of the processes will allow the reader to familiarize her/himself with the everyday workings of Blooming Flower, as well as provide a foundation on which my analysis can be solidly based and issues of empowerment can be clearly examined.

## CHAPTER 3

### DATA: METHODS, SETTING, FRAMEWORK

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 represents many academic fields: sociology, philosophy, psychology, history and women's studies. The conclusions of this literature are derived from a variety of methods. For example, Bordo (1993) and Barthel (1988) use textual analysis of advertisements; Wolf uses previous survey research and statistics, interviews of women who had beauty used against them, and legal proceedings; and Hatfield and Sprecher (1986) rely on a variety of psychological studies. A few researchers have utilized personal experience in the analysis of beauty. Foltyn (1990) emphasized and utilized interview data of 'beautiful' women to explore the social construction of the beautiful self. Chapkis (1986) used personal accounts written by women at the end of each chapter to add real life experience to her analysis of the politics of beauty.

This study fills a gap in the beauty literature and elaborates on issues of empowerment by providing a qualitative analysis of a woman-centered direct selling cosmetic company: Blooming Flower Cosmetics. This chapter discusses the merits of this type of study, as well as benefits of studying this specific company. In addition, this chapter provides a

foundation for the presentation of the findings by describing the setting, the informants and the theoretical framework utilized in this study.

### This Study

As is documented in the literature, the body is a site for cultural struggle (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Chernin 1981; Foltyn 1990; Pogrebin 1983; Wolf 1991). The process and definition of beauty for women is central to this struggle. In order to understand beauty, it is essential to study the sites in which it is created, negotiated, and sold. This study will provide answers to questions that other studies do not. Topics of focus are: Issues surrounding women and success, how beauty is defined and negotiated, how beauty is tied to issues of self-esteem, how beauty is tied to empowerment, and how women sell beauty to other women.

Blooming Flower Cosmetics is a direct selling cosmetics company run primarily by women. This makes it an exemplary place to study beauty and its link to empowerment. It is a arena in which women teaching other women not only how to be 'beautiful,' but also how to make a lifestyle or career out of being 'beautiful.' This provides a unique understanding of beauty and empowerment. That is, often in our culture when women have a chance to grow and succeed personally and financially, it is usually facilitated by members of the male gender. In this situation women are supported, emotionally and professionally by other women. These women tend to be of

the similar life experiences, class and backgrounds. These two characteristics eradicate the tendency of the haves teaching the have-nots, and in doing so attempt to weaken the gender hierarchy by empowering from within.

Additionally, the cosmetics industry tends to be a male run industry. As such it is seen as disempowering because women do not actively participate in the definition and negotiation of beauty. My study of Blooming Flower Cosmetics adds a wholeness to the analysis of beauty as a male-controlled and male-focused entity by providing a picture of how women act as agents in the definition of beauty and issues of empowerment. The existing literature is problematic because it paints an overly structural picture and negates the role of agency of women in terms of beauty. This study provides a unique angle because it reintroduces the concept of agency to the study of beauty and empowerment. The use of ethnographic research methods allows a focus on the everyday actions and reactions that play into the making beauty an integral part of the women involved, instead of an issue that is often discussed and analyzed separate from the women and their daily existence. This hands on participatory method of research exposes the complexities, negotiations and shaping as they pertain to what appearance and beauty means for these woman.

### Methods

In order to fully grasp what beauty means for the women

at Blooming Flower Cosmetics, I needed to immerse myself in the actions and experiences that go into training a Blooming Flower beauty consultant, and how a consultant in turn teaches women how to be beautiful. This exposure included participant observation and in-depth interviews. With these methods I observed three of the key processes of the Blooming Flower experience--training beauty consultants to sell cosmetics, training the consultants to recruit new consultants into Blooming Flower, and the actual selling of the cosmetics by the beauty consultants. These processes will be discussed later in this chapter.

Getting into Blooming Flower was easier than I had anticipated. I had consulted the yellow pages in the telephone book and found that a senior director had taken an advertisement out. I decided to telephone her, and after several phone tag incidents, I was able to set up a time to visit with her. I had explained over the phone that I was a student at Loyola University wanting to do some research on beauty. She was very receptive and wanted to hear more about my intentions. At an informal meeting at her house I explained that I wanted to research what beauty meant for women and what role it played in the making of their identities, both individually and as a social group. My reception was phenomenal. My key informant made incredible efforts to call me with times and places of events that would be helpful to observe and participate in. The consultants

involved with my key informant were equally as welcoming and helpful. It should be noted that my positive reception into Blooming Flower might have been due to fact that I was perceived as a potential recruit and/or customer. It is a general rule of thumb that Blooming Flower consultants should approach any woman with the idea that they may be a potential recruit/customer. Since promotion and rewards within the company are based on recruitment and sales, this is taken seriously. Concomitantly, there were in fact several attempts to recruit me throughout the study.

I attended nine sales meetings which are held weekly by a director for her consultants.<sup>1</sup> These nine meetings consisted of five meetings with a Wednesday night group and four meetings with a Tuesday night group. These meetings are used to train the consultants how to sell and recruit. They are also used by the director to inspire and motivate the consultants. My presence at the weekly sales meetings gave me an understanding of what it takes to succeed as a Blooming Flower consultant, and what moves the consultants to get motivated and sell. This essentially provided me with a view of how the private side of Blooming Flower works and what beauty is about for Blooming Flower. The meetings also provided me with information about the company that I couldn't get from the classes.

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<sup>1</sup>I attended weekly meetings and events with the following exceptions: spring break, cancellations, photo shoots, work-related interferences, and a minor research break in May.

I also observed four skin care and glamour "classes" at various homes around the Chicagoland area. These "classes" are the main method of selling and recruiting for Blooming Flower consultants.<sup>2</sup> Each class that I attended had a different consultant teaching a different group of women how to care for their skin and how to apply cosmetics. The differing of consultants seemed essential to capture a variety of methods of selling, as well as capture a spectrum of beauty definitions. The observation of the meetings and classes allowed me to see a very large part of what it means to be a beauty consultant at Blooming Flower. The classes allowed me to experience what beauty means for Blooming Flower, how selling beauty works, who the customers of Blooming Flower are, how they react, and demonstrated how Blooming Flower succeeds as a direct selling cosmetic company.

I participated as a guest in two of these skin care and glamour classes. My participation aided in experiencing the guest's point of view. Both observing and participating at these classes helped me form conclusions on the issue of empowerment and beauty within the context of Blooming Flower

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<sup>2</sup>The use of the word "classes" is significant for two reasons. One, I feel it provides a window into what beauty means for these women--that it is something to be learned, something specific, taught only in certain cultural locations. Secondly, coupled with the idea that potentially any and every woman is approachable and in need of Blooming Flower's products and instruction, these classes are an essential part of femininity and thus womanhood. This provides a window into what it means to be a woman, according to the Blooming Flower experience.

Cosmetics. For example, instances of perceived increased beauty and/or personal and social worth were more readily assimilated into my understanding and knowledge of what becoming beautiful means, since I was with them step by step during the transformation from less beautiful to more beautiful. Others comments on my own transformation were helpful in these understanding issues as well.

Besides attending the skin care and glamour classes, I also attended two "photo shoots."<sup>3</sup> These events are held monthly by the consultants and directors for any potential or current Blooming Flower customers. Before and after photographs are taken of the guests, and afterward, the directors talk to the guests about career opportunities with Blooming Flower. I participated in the process of skin care and glamour application at one of these photo shoots. The before and after photos are presented in appendix 1. Again, this participation allowed me to gain the perspective of the customer, and observing these events provided a view of how Blooming Flower markets themselves to their customers. Descriptions of the actual skin care and glamour classes and the photo shoots will be laid out later in this chapter.

Lastly, I attended a training session for new

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<sup>3</sup>The titling of these events as "photo shoots" implicates a model-like feeling of importance and beauty. These photo shoots are designed to encourage an association of prestige and increased social and personal worth that is applied to fashion and glamour models. They successfully attach positive feelings to the use of Blooming Flower products and instruction, and to Blooming Flower as a career choice.



consultants. Due to poor weather conditions, no new consultants showed, thus the director and I spent the time conversing. This time was used to obtain information on the organizational and pay structures, as well as the would-be training session plan for that day. This experience significantly expanded my knowledge concerning Blooming Flower as a business, and its conceptions of beauty. These findings will be found woven throughout the two discussion chapters following this chapter.

While the above participant observations provided exposure to the process and workings of Blooming Flower, in-depth, open-ended interviews with my key informants, 'Judy,' a sales director who has been with Blooming Flower for 11 years, and 'Laura,' a woman who had been a consultant for five months provided me with the necessary detail to solidify and inform my experiences with those processes. My first two interviews with Judy and Laura pertained to a general description of beauty of the interviewees. These related less specifically to the Blooming Flower experience and more specifically to personal and general social conceptions of beauty. The third interview with Judy proved to bridge concepts of beauty and empowerment with Blooming Flower. That is, this interview strengthened my interpretations of Blooming Flower, beauty and issues of empowerment.

#### The Setting

The setting for the weekly sales meetings and the photo

shoots consisted of a meeting room that is rented by a group of Blooming Flower directors in a medical building in a northern suburb bordering Chicago.<sup>4</sup> The room was approximately 25x40 feet with white walls and blue matted carpeting. The walls were decorated with motivational posters and banners, pictures of the 100 top selling Blooming Flower directors in the country, tallies of how certain consultants were doing in particular contests of selling and recruiting, a picture of the founder of Blooming Flower, and other various pictures of Blooming Flower events. There were six or seven rows with 10 or so plastic white chairs and blue chairs with metal legs which were arranged to face a specific director's wall. Three directors used this room for their weekly sales meetings, thus the chairs were arranged to face the wall that corresponded to the specific director's group of beauty consultants. Various tables lined the walls with cosmetic displays and other Blooming Flower paraphernalia. The room was rearranged during photo shoots so that chairs lined all the sides of all the tables to incorporate a large quantity of guests. At these events there is usually a few small rows of seats left for the overflow of guests and consultants and directors.

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<sup>4</sup>This building was rented because the company did not provide meeting space for the directors and consultants. Because the directors and consultants were free to relocate their Blooming Flower businesses, it was a more economically sound choice for the directors to rent (instead of buying) a meeting space.

The settings at the skin care and glamour classes varied, as the classes were held in individuals homes. All of them consisted of displays of Blooming Flower cosmetics, bath products, perfume and the men's line occupying nearby tables and shelving units.<sup>5</sup> The guests generally sat at a dining room table or a table placed in a living room. Pallets of make-up with mirrors attached were placed in front of each guest.<sup>6</sup> The consultant generally stood and moved about instructing the women and distributing samples of the product for usage.

#### Learning the Blooming Flower way--The Unit Meeting

The weekly unit meetings as noted in Chapter 1 exist to motivate the consultants. Motivation is the main fuel for Blooming Flower as a business. The company is set up such that the beauty consultants and sales directors are in charge of selling all products. In order to keep the company financially viable, it needs to be guaranteed that the consultants and directors will indeed sell as much product as

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<sup>5</sup>Because of the required product display, it was generally easier to have the guests come to the consultant or director's house. But, because not everyone had the privilege of a consistent source of transformation, or it was inconvenient to have everyone travel to the consultants house, classes were often held at others' homes. Generally, the classes were held at the woman who was originally contacted home.

<sup>6</sup>One exception existed to this rule during my observations. One of the classes I attended took place during a bachelorette party. Women were dispersed throughout the room, with some sitting on the floor, on a couch and at a table.

possible. As such, Blooming Flower has made motivation its core emphasis and thus, has established two primary methods of motivation.

The first method is through recognition through the giving of gifts or prizes for certain sales based or recruitment based achievements. In developing this system of recognition the founder utilized her concept of women to define it. Judy explains how the founder decided the system:

She says women will work for recognition when they won't work for other--for money. If they have money, they are going to go out and buy a refrigerator, or clothes for the kids or something like that. If someone gives them a diamond ring they'll go for that, because they'd never buy that for themselves.<sup>7</sup>

And in fact, jewelry does make up the majority of prizes. Other prizes include coffee makers, purses, luggage, and even cars. The cars are given with the lease and partial insurance paid and is rewarded for a certain level of sales with a specific number of people recruited. These prizes do appear to motivate a lot of the consultants and is often a method of talking of success. I often heard consultants say 'in six months I'm going to driving that car' or 'in no time I'll be wearing that ring.' At the time of the second interview Judy was working toward winning a set of luggage: "I've got luggage right now that I'm working on--I want this luggage.

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<sup>7</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

I really want the luggage, so I know what I gotta do."<sup>8</sup>

This system of motivation appears to not only work well, but make the consultants and directors happy as well. Judy notes that the founder "is just unbelievable at understanding how to give recognition and to motivate people and to inspire people through recognition."<sup>9</sup> She continues "it is the quality of the prizes--certainly a GrandAm is a nice prize...nice recognition for work done. I mean I work harder at other things and you see not even a comment."<sup>10</sup> This recognition is a source of pride and as such is a focal point of discussion at most events. How many cars someone has won from Blooming Flower in their career denotes a level of success. 'What [number] car' someone is 'on' is key to the identity of these women as Blooming Flower consultants and as successful women.

Activities to give recognition exist at the meetings as well. For example, the sales levels are announced out loud at the beginning of each meeting so that the consultant who has sold the most can be recognized by receiving attention and praise from the unit. The directors, at every unit meeting, have the women stand up as they count by increments of fifty dollars to weed out the top seller of the group. The

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<sup>8</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

consultants sit down as the director gets to the level of sales that they had the previous week. The last consultant standing is then the top seller of the consultants at the meeting and is awarded the title of 'assistant sales director' for the evening. The assistant sales director then aides the director in running the meeting.

The second form of motivation and inspiration is the use of compliments and supportive language and activities by the directors for the consultants. One of the stated roles of the director is that of making the women feel good about themselves. At the basis of this is the requirement of a positive attitude. When asked about this, Judy stated:

We are trained that 90% of our success is attitude, therefore we have to take care of attitude, and the meeting is a big attitude lifter . . . there's a real strong emphasis at the meetings on being positive. Leave your negativity at home please, it'll be there when you get back (chuckles).<sup>11</sup>

To facilitate this positive attitude and create a feeling of importance, at the beginning of the unit meetings a portion of time is used as for the consultants tell of positive things going on in their lives. This segment called the 'good news segment' which is lead by the assistant sales director for the evening and is used to kick off the evening with positive thoughts and stories. As the women ask for good news from the unit they snap their fingers in unison which gives it more of an upbeat, communal feel.

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<sup>11</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

Coupled with the positive attitude is the director's expression of 'unstoppable' happiness. I never witnessed anything less than extreme happiness from the directors. Even their answering machines have an exhilarating delightful voice message on them. This happiness is used to in a sense induce a positive attitude and a positive image of Blooming Flower. If a negative topic comes up at a meeting, an immediate positive response is relayed. 'But you've learned from that experience, haven't you?!' or 'We're having so much fun, aren't we?!' were common phrases that attempted to create a positive perspective. An unspoken assumption exists that perhaps the positive attitude will wear off on the consultant and motivate them into selling more.

Compliments were also a large part of the unit meetings I attended. Sara would often compliment her consultants and phrase it so that other consultants could participate in the activity of complimenting. For instance, one consultant named Helen who typically sold the most had to quit her other job to dedicate her energies to Blooming Flower. She was continually complimented by the director while she was standing up leading the 'good news segment' of the sales meeting. While Helen was standing up in the front one particular night Sara commented on how great she looked with her coordinated outfit on, noting that you could tell she used to be an interior designer.

"Doesn't she look great everybody?!"<sup>12</sup> Sara said this type of compliment several more times noting twice that we were just 'sitting back admiring her.'<sup>13</sup> At one point this evening Sara said 'don't her eyes look beautiful, I'm going home and trying that method.'<sup>14</sup> This direct compliment also doubled as indirect recognition that successfully defined Helen as the expert in eye application in this situation, which is something that I thought felt rewarding and flattering for Helen as was apparent by her large grin.

Compliments, Judy notes, are perhaps the best motivator:

Most of all I think it's the teaching of people to compliment each other, and give sincere compliments, and sincere praise from the directors and from the founder herself. I mean if you wrote to her, she'd write back to you.<sup>15</sup>

The compliments are used at the skin care classes and photo shoots as well, as they serve as one of the better sales techniques. A customer considering buying a product that is supposed to accentuate her appearance would be more likely to buy it if outsiders told her that she looked fabulous with it on. Hence, this technique is used pervasively throughout Blooming Flower.

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<sup>12</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 17 February 1994.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.



The compliments work to build sales in other ways. If a consultant finds a product that works for her (i.e., people give her compliments when she uses it) she then believes in the product. Thus, it is more likely to sell the product because she believes in it and can speak to its results. According to Judy, this ability to claim that it works and personal usage is very important and perhaps the best sales technique.

Along with personal compliments came the massive use of supportive and congratulatory comments. Almost after every mention of a Blooming Flower sale or move to sell or recruit Sara would use a congratulatory comment like 'good work!' or more common, 'isn't she great?!' or 'way to go!' Sara personalizes each motivational/congratulatory moment with the use of the consultant's name. Many times she talked of 'how much \_\_\_\_\_ is going to soar.'

The training that occurs in these the meetings covers three general areas. The first area is the instruction and reiteration of the application of the products and highlights or introduction of new/seasonal products. General information on basic application is offered in the form of visual aides either on paper or in person. The paper visual aides that I encountered took the form of drawings of faces with one eye closed and one eye open. The shades of eye color, lipstick, blusher and eyebrow pencil had already been applied on the face with instructions on how to achieve the specific look

shown along with the colors used on that specific face. This type of aid is also used to show customers at skin care classes how to apply the make-up. The hostess or other guests are often offered to pick out a 'look' that they would like to have. These aids are also available in the beauty book that they sell (see appendix 2).

One of Blooming Flower's main rules is that the customer applies her own make-up. This rule insures that when she is alone in her own home that she does not find herself unable to replicate what was done at a skin care and glamour class or at a photo shoot. This premise tends to simplify things for the company. That is, a few main methods of application can be taught, along with special instructions for eyes that have special requirements.

Several times I witnessed a demonstration of application at the unit meeting which took the form of a make-over. The director Sara scheduled these make-overs to demonstrate how to use the new spring glamour collection as well as generate excitement for the new products in hopes that the consultants' excitement would result in increased purchases by the customer.

The second type of training revolved around aspects of booking and conducting skin care and glamour classes. There are steps and practices that Blooming Flower deem important to maintaining a professional image, and maximizing the experience of the women, both with the goal of increased

sales. The training techniques for this are numerous. One method that I witnessed twice was that of a skit of what a consultant is not to do. Jeanne was asked by Sara perform a skit of how a skin care class should not go. The skit entailed Jeanne coming in late into a fictitious skin care and glamour class. She was not dressed in ways deemed appropriate for a Blooming Flower consultant. She had her name tag upside down, her snow boots were still on and she had applied her make-up 'poorly' (i.e., she was wearing lip liner without the lipstick). She came unprepared without pens to fill out the skin care profile, and she forgot to bring her washcloths that the guests needed to remove the cleanser and the mask with. Her make-up and skin care displays were stored in plastic Osco bags and she had 'used' products in the display trays, both indicating a sense of "unprofessionalism." She announced the fact that the products were 'used' to the fictitious customers, reassuring them that their products would be new. Her hurried manner and the uncertainty in her actions lead to the impression of extreme disorganization and added to the theme of unprofessionalism that the event was supposed to foster. It was apparent that these actions were known to be unacceptable by the laughter from the rest of the consultants and Sara herself. Sara used this skit to lead into a reminder that the consultants should always wear two blushers, three eye shadows, lip liner, lipstick, eye liner, mascara and eyebrow pencil along with the protection (the foundation). At

this point Sara reminded them that the consultants were not to sell the five step skin care collection in separate pieces unless the customer is already a Blooming Flower user and has run out of one of the products or is wanting to try another type.

Other methods of training the consultants to sell include the walk through or reenactment of an attempt to book a class with an unknown woman over the phone. The training for how to book classes is probably the most important type of training. Its importance was apparent by the amount of time spent talking about it. Sara did several reenactments of how to book classes over the phone, going over word for word what to say, along with tips on how to deal with uninterested customers.

The larger portion of the training on how to sell products and book classes took the form of coaching the consultants how important it is 'to keep focused.' Focus was the key topic in every meeting that I attended. According to Sara, the biggest problem experienced by the consultant, and that which keeps the consultant from achieving success, is lack of focus. 'Focus' in Blooming Flower is the fuel that the women needed to be able to pick up the phone and attempt to book skin care classes with strangers on the other end of the line. This 'picking up the phone' was tough for women and was at the heart of the explanations of why women didn't sell as much as they wanted. Sara reinforced the need to get over

this fear by reiterating a need for focus: 'Business isn't going to come down from heaven.'<sup>16</sup>

A method that Judy uses in her meetings to help the women in her unit keep focused is called 'paint the picture.' This method entails motivating the consultants by emphasizing what it would look like or feel like to achieve the level of success that they are aiming for. Below Judy describes how she works to keep a consultant focused who wanted to sell enough (\$32,000 retail in a year) to win a diamond ring on stage at the yearly Blooming Flower event called Seminar:

And so when I'm working with Shawna and she's also working to win a diamond ring on stage and so I work with Shawna, I say 'Shawna, stand up! Show everyone how you are going to wave when you're on stage! Let's all applaud Shawna!' So we recreate the scene ok, cause that is going to inspire her. Uh, for other people that are more motivated by money I say 'what are you going to do with the money you're gonna get when you have enough recruits to win a car?!' 'How is your husband gonna feel when you drive up to that house in your car that you got from Blooming Flower, no insurance, no car payments?!'<sup>17</sup>

### Selling the Blooming Flower way--The Classes

As noted above, the holding or 'booking' of skin care and glamour classes are what makes the company and the consultant successful. After all, it is at these classes that the consultants not only sell the products, but they obtain and build on their customer base and recruit people into Blooming

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<sup>16</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 18 March 1994.

<sup>17</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

Flower.

The classes are set up through some sort of interaction with a potential or current customer. The method of finding this person varies. Some women do 'cold calling.' Cold calling involves calling someone with no agenda other than introducing the callee to Blooming Flower cosmetics, and subsequently trying to secure a person-to-person interaction with that callee. The call usually involves the presentation of the gift of a complimentary beauty consultation, be it a computerized beauty analysis, a facial, or a skin care and glamour class with a few of the woman's friends and family members. This last option appears to be the best because it had the potential of generating the most customers, as well as resulting in immediate and future sales. The consultants are taught to establish a rapport before trying to establish an interest in Blooming Flowers products. Having something to connect to the woman on the other line is stated as essential in making the woman feel important. As Judy stated in an interview, the importance of that personal service is key to Blooming Flower's marketing technique. She notes that Blooming Flower "pretends that everyone is wearing a sign that says 'make me feel important'."<sup>18</sup> Once rapport is established then the offering begins of free skin care classes or facials.

Innovative methods have been used to gather lists of

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<sup>18</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

women to call. Some of the methods employed that I discovered at the meetings were working off of lists of the local welcome wagon, gathering a list of marital engagements from the local newspaper, and placing a box at in a health club locker room denoting a contest geared toward the winning of Blooming Flower products. These methods give the consultant a chance to talk to the women about their new home, their wedding forthcoming, and common experiences at the gym. Additionally, it functions to add an element of familiarity to the conversation to make the consultant appear less of an unknown salesperson.

Blooming Flower sets it up so that the hostess of the skin care class gets special treatment. This treatment involves the use of glamour products such as eye liner, lip liner and special white concealer, that the others in the skin care and glamour class do not get to use. Additionally, some consultants give the hostess a gift for holding the class. Lastly and perhaps most important to the marketing plan, the hostess receives 'hostess credit.' This credit is a percentage based on the dollar amount of products ordered by the rest of the guests. This serves a reciprocity function, thanking the hostess for gathering some potential customers to experience Blooming Flower, and generally functioning to make the hostess a routine customer of Blooming Flower.

The class begins with the women filling out forms called skin care profiles that determine the skin type and typical

skin 'problems' the customer might have. These problems are defined by Blooming Flower as those that every woman experiences--skin that is too dry, too oily or combination. The consultant, through the inspection of the forms, decides the skin type of the guest and proceeds to squeeze samples of the products determined to be appropriate to her specific skin type onto white styrofoam pallets connected to each guests personal mirror. The consultant, after making some opening comments about herself and her career with Blooming Flower, begins giving instructions on how to apply the skin care products.

Nearly every consultant attempts to integrate the basic Blooming Flower techniques and stated affects of the products into their classes. Not surprisingly, every woman emphasizes, incorporates, and expands on them as they see fit. For the most part, however, the goals of the skin care products and the recommended system remain consistent. They are as follows: Step one, the cleanser, cleans surface dirt; step two, the mask, rids the face of dead skin cells, or exfoliates the skin; step three, the freshener, returns the ph balance to the skin; step four, the moisturizer, restores the moisture to the skin and adds elasticity; step five, the foundation or the protection, protects the skin from 'environmental elements' that may harm the skin and make it age and wrinkle. This five step routine is necessary according to Blooming Flower's literature because "it removes debris that detract from your



appearance . . . your skin is vital to your well-being."<sup>19</sup>

Several additional skin care products are usually introduced to the guests as well. The most prominent of these and one of the better sellers is Blooming Flower's new Skin Revival System. This system contains, like all the new technological advanced wrinkle formulas on the market today, alpha hydroxy acids. This system was developed 'to reduce wrinkles and lines, make skin tauter and replenish moisture.' In fact, Sara emphasized at a unit meeting that "Blooming Flower **guarantees** 38% reduction in lines and wrinkles, 21% increase in moisture replenishment and a 36% increase in tauter skin."<sup>20</sup>

Techniques exist as well that are used when necessary and in different ways. The techniques found to be most pervasive are those that accompany the skin care part of the class. The consultants and Blooming Flower tell their customers and potential customers to always use upward strokes starting at the jaw line or 'opposite of how we want our skin to grow' in order to avoid the development of wrinkles and lines. Two exceptions exist. On the eyes, the guest should start above the eye and work around toward the center of the face and down, sweeping underneath the eye and back out to the edge of the face. This was stated as very important so as to, as

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<sup>19</sup>Beauty, 9-10.

<sup>20</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 16 March 1994.

Marcia said at one class, 'do our best to avoid crows feet around the eyes.'<sup>21</sup> Judy also added in one class that the muscle grows in this direction around the eye so that any other technique would tend to pull the skin in the opposite direction of the muscle, potentially loosening the skin which may lead to additional wrinkles and bags under the eyes. The other exception is the nose. The skin, Marcia noted, has skin follicles that open upward so that strokes should be downward from the forehead to the lip, avoiding clogging of the pores that may lead to blemishes.

The mask step was essential to the skin care part of the class because it gave the consultant time (it took approximately ten minutes to dry) to tell the guest about specific aspects of the company and its products. For instance, I saw some consultants use this as a time to talk of the career opportunities with Blooming Flower. Others used it as a time to have the guests write down the names of their friends whom the consultant could call and offer a facial, a skin care and glamour class, a manicure, an invitation to the photo shoot, or a computerized beauty analysis. In other words, this was a key marketing time because all attention was on the consultant and the products.

A new approach used during this 'mask' time to solicit names called 'The Beauty of Friendship' was introduced in a

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<sup>21</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 9 February 1994.

meeting by Sara. This approach involved the passing out of small (2"x3") pink cards with an image of blotted lipstick. The consultant explains that Blooming Flower knows that the women don't have the time in their busy day to write a 'just because I care' note to their dearest friends. The consultant then offers them a chance to do that for their three best buddies and the consultant will call them and set up a time to present them with the note, a free gift, and a free make-over. Direct feedback on how well this system worked was not presented during my study, but the consultants appeared to like the approach as was apparent by the demand for the pink cards to use at their classes.

The glamour section of the class takes the bulk of the time and also varies considerably from consultant to consultant.<sup>22</sup> The consultant, sometimes with the aid of the guests, picks out the colors that the guests will apply. Colors are generally picked according to what color-type the person is determined to be by the consultant. The guests are labeled 'cool' or 'warm' according to their skin type, hair and eye color, and what clothes they tend to wear. The glamour portion of the class usually entails the application of blusher, lipstick, eye shadow, concealer, powder and

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<sup>22</sup>The order in which the products are applied rarely varied. The only time I witnessed a variation was with the under-eye concealer and the foundation. Some consultants had the guests apply the foundation first, while others had the guests apply the concealer first. I inquired about this variation in method and was told that either is appropriate.

mascara with the hostess getting the 'complete look' as discussed above.

Techniques of application of the make-up vary considerably. Some general application tips did show up consistently in the classes and photo shoots that I observed and participated in. For instance, the blusher is told to be applied two finger widths away from the nose and not below the level that one's nostrils lay. An eye shadow application technique which is shown in the beauty book and was used by all the consultants in the classes, uses a 'V' shape to apply the main eye color. This begins with one light neutral base coat of eye shadow that is applied to the entire eyelid area and then the second color is applied in a sideways 'V' starting on the lower part of the eyelid, about a third of the way in and working outward to the end of the eye and then up into a 'V' (see appendix 1 for example).

Stated benefits or effects from the use of the cosmetics help convince the guests that these products could aid them in becoming beautiful and help them to keep their skin younger for longer. The stated benefits tend to be ubiquitous. The concealer is said to help hide wrinkles, dark circles and blemishes. The foundation is said to provide a 'primer' coat of sorts that 'protects the skin' and prepares it for the application of glamour.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 17 February 1994.

The ability of the glamour products to transform how women appear is the main highlight of the skin care and glamour class. Additionally, personal instruction of how to work with their face and learn techniques to make themselves more beautiful is invaluable to the customer. Judy considers this to be the strongest asset of Blooming Flower. She believes that this personal instruction that gives Blooming Flower an edge over those that just offer the product for sale in a drug or department store.<sup>24</sup>

These transformative techniques that I encountered covered a wide range and involved a variety of products. Correct application of the blusher will 'open the face up' according to Judy.<sup>25</sup> At another class, Fran noted that the use of eyeliner can help 'make your eyes stand out'. The correct use of the concealer, the foundation, and the facial powder will aid in covering any blemish, dark circles and even freckles. I experienced what these products can do when Judy made me over at the photo shoot. She had me put on several coats of concealer to cover 'those circles underneath my eyes' (see appendix 2).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

<sup>25</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 17 March 1994.

<sup>26</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 1 March 1994.

### The Informants

The consultants and directors that I met and observed during my research with Blooming Flower varied. For the most part, they were married with children and were living a working-class or middle-class lifestyle. While the majority appeared to be caucasian, there appeared to be a wide range of nationalities and racial categories represented. For instance, Sara, the director whose sales meetings I attended February through April, was of Asian descent, and Fran, a consultant whom I observed at a skin care and glamour class, was African American. I discovered that a significant population of Spanish women existed within Blooming Flower, hence a corresponding Spanish language training session occurred alongside the English training sessions on Saturdays. Overall, I estimate the breakdown racially and ethnically as follows: 65% White, 20% African American, 13% Hispanic, and 2% Asian. For the most part, the women ranged from 27 to 50 years of age and were either full-time mothers and/or held full-time to part-time jobs. The mothers with small children tended to hold jobs that were non career-oriented, such as retail or child care jobs. There was an occasional full-time Blooming Flower consultant, but generally the women had other key responsibilities, such as children or other jobs. Some of the other jobs included the areas of household and industrial cleaning services, social work, interior decorating, child care, insurance, occupational therapy, and secretarial work.

Three consultants were attending some type of school as well. The directors and those in training to be directors were working full-time with Blooming Flower as it takes a tremendous amount of time to be a director.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study comes from symbolic interactionism. I chose symbolic interactionism because it addresses issues pertaining to the understanding of meanings, perspectives and subjective definitions. It also fits the method of study. The key to understanding how Blooming Flower women make sense of their surroundings is to grasp how meaning is made concerning issues such as what beauty is, what women are and what women want. How these women view beauty and women is integral to understanding the perspective from which they act. What being a beauty consultant at Blooming Flower means to these women is central in understanding how beauty can be empowering or disempowering. Understanding and utilizing a theory whose basic premise is meanings which are socially produced during interaction is necessary to make sense out of these women's experiences with beauty. The meanings that the consultants attach to their experience are those that make the issues of empowerment and disempowerment real.

Now that the everyday occurrences have been described in detail and the theoretical framework has been laid out, analysis can begin. Both issues of empowerment and

disempowerment existed within the experience of beauty at Blooming Flower. The next two chapters will cover these findings. Chapter 4 will focus on the empowering effects discovered through my experience at Blooming Flower. Chapter 5 will discuss the aspects of disempowerment discovered through my research.



## CHAPTER 4

### BEAUTY AS EMPOWERING: "'MADE UP' FOR SUCCESS"

From my observations at Blooming Flower, my interviews with my key informants, and a review of Blooming Flower literature it appears that issues of empowerment are complex. If one takes the perspective of the consultants, a different story of empowerment emerges. By examining their words and actions in various Blooming Flower situations instances of empowerment are discovered. A discussion of these aspects and processes follows.

First, it was apparent that Blooming Flower empowered the group of women I observed by offering them a chance to maintain their life style as mothers as well as attempt to have a career. Most women involved with Blooming Flower whether married or not tended to be the primary caretakers of the children and household. This flexibility was greatly appreciated by many of the women. This was apparent in some of the first visits to the unit meetings in which Sara had every consultant introduce themselves, and tell about their experience at Blooming Flower, including what they liked best about Blooming Flower. Nearly everyone who had kids, stated that their favorite thing about their Blooming Flower career was the fact that they could take care of their kids **and** do a

Blooming Flower career. For example, a new consultant, Pam, liked the idea that Blooming Flower allowed her to prioritize her children, something which her previous job in retail had not allowed her to do.

Two aspects of the job as beauty consultant were looked favorably upon and were tooted as compatible with full-time parenting. First, the non-quota system that Blooming Flower offered allowed the option of working as much as they wanted or as little as they wanted. This was advantageous to women whose family life was a key focus. Many women took advantage of the flexibility of the hours worked and often let work take a back burner as parenting or home life got hectic. This often secondary nature of their Blooming Flower career was most obvious by the absence of women at the weekly sales meetings. Of the two groups that I observed, only a handful of women came to every meeting. My key informant, Judy often explained the sporadic nature of the consultants' participation as 'life happens.'<sup>1</sup>

The setting of one's own hours was the second benefit of working for Blooming Flower. This flexibility allowed the consultants to schedule time for phone calls, filling or calling-in orders, or delivering products to customers on time that was not pertinent to spend on other life happenings. Often the skin care and glamour classes were held at night

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<sup>1</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

because of potential customer's work schedules. This was advantageous for those dual parent families since the spouse could watch the kids. For single parents, the classes could be held at home, so a sitter was not necessary, or neighbors and family were used as sitters.

This flexibility allowed the women to be home when the kids got home from school, as well as the time to prepare meals for the family. Pam, a new recruit who had been working in retail for four years, was excited to begin her Blooming Flower career for this reason. Not only did this save her money in terms of child care, but she could "participate in her kids lives more."<sup>2</sup> Jeanne, had been providing a day care service in her home as a way to earn money. However, taking care of numerous kids was incredibly draining and offered no room for personal and economic growth. Thus, Blooming Flower was a very welcome experience for her. In an interview with a key informant, the flexibility of the job was described as a major factor in attracting women. For instance, Judy noted "I can run off to California for three days. I can't do that with other jobs, and I like that freedom."<sup>3</sup>

This focus on prioritizing family life is a core principal on which the company was founded. In an autobiography by the founder, she describes her ideology of

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<sup>2</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 9 February 1994.

<sup>3</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

how life should be priority. Her motto is 'God first, family second, and career third.' In a chapter entitled the same she states:

. . . no matter how successful you are in your career, if you lose your family in the process of attaining that success, then you have failed. Money is not worth sacrificing your family. A career is a means to an end-a means by which you can provide comforts and security for your family-but what you accomplish in your career is not an end in itself. Unfortunately, some people become so consumed with their work that they lose sight of what's really important in life.<sup>4</sup>

This aspect is part of Blooming Flower's mission statement and was reiterated several times during my research and proved to be a reinforcement to many women to continue to keep primary focus on the family.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, Blooming Flower leads to the development of skills that promote an increased self-esteem and sense of self-worth for these women. At the heart of this esteem building process was the struggle of standing up in front of women and presenting Blooming Flower Cosmetics. Being able to present oneself as a knowledgeable human being and stand up in front of others and instruct people is something that for a lot of women was problematic in the beginning. Jeanne, a successful consultant, spoke of breaking down and crying right before beginning her first class because she was nervous and felt that she could not do it. Reba shared her story of being so nervous doing her first

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<sup>4</sup>Katherine White (pseud.), *Blooming Flower*, New York: Blue Books (pseud.), 64.

facial that she could not finish. She said, "I was so embarrassed that I had my sister deliver products to the customer a few days later!"<sup>5</sup>

Self-esteem building appeared to be an on-going process for many women. At one meeting, Helen, the leader in sales of her unit, told a personal success story about finally feeling confident enough to stand up and tell a customer of hers that she could not buy the 'foundation' alone. She explained that company policy is such that the five step skin care system is to be sold and used as a system, and that consultants were not to sell separate pieces if it is known that the customer is not using the entire system. This denial of a product to a customer was something that took six months for Helen to do. In the founder's autobiography this process of building self-esteem and the building of other skills are discussed:

For me, seeing so many women grow and develop has been the most meaningful accomplishment of Blooming Flower Cosmetics. Everyone benefits when we can pass on the 'You can do it!' spirit. Often we meet a woman when she is like a tight little rosebud, full of potential never revealed. After a few months of praise and encouragement, she blossoms into a beautiful rose, poised and confident in her new-found skills.<sup>6</sup>

This confidence does in fact exist, as most women talked of these stories in the past tense, and others added the typical

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<sup>5</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 9 February 1994.

<sup>6</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 9.

'but now, I stand with confidence and pride.'<sup>7</sup>

This issue of confidence and self-esteem building is important enough that it is discussed in the process of recruiting. In a Blooming Flower training video, a recruiting scene is reenacted to demonstrate the process of recruiting. In this video the potential recruit expresses uncertainty about her ability to teach other women (i.e., standing up in front of other women and claim a knowledge of beauty). This is included in the video because it is an issue often heard by those recruiting. One senior director discussed this confidence issue with a group of potential recruits and customers attending a photo shoot. She offered a theory that she claimed built confidence. "If you look good, you feel good, and if you feel good, you act your best."<sup>8</sup> She proceeded to talk of her anxiety in the beginning of her career at Blooming Flower. She explained that a lot of women feel that they cannot do it. She added: "slowly but surely you build confidence."<sup>9</sup> She finished her point by explaining how personally and financially successful she had become through her career at Blooming Flower.

Realizing that this is an issue, a significant portion of Blooming Flower training works specifically on building the

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<sup>7</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 9 February 1994.

<sup>8</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 1 March 1994.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

confidence of the consultants. Sara, as a director trying to train, motivate and inspire, tries to get the women up in front of everyone as much as possible to help build their confidence. For a lot of women, standing up in front was a hard thing to get used to. Kristy, for example, did not like to stand up in front of others, and frequently let others know this. She would tend to resistant when asked to stand up. One technique that Sara used to build confidence was to ask a different consultant to prepare a skit, a bit of product knowledge, or a personal success story of one of the national sales directors, and present it in front of everyone. This rotated the responsibility of presenting information and gave each woman a chance to build confidence and presentation skills.

Having consultants share confidence building stories, such as positive experiences with career activities, also built confidence. At one unit meeting Sara had Helen tell all the women about a conference that she went to that specifically focused on confidence issues. At the end of this conference everyone wrote good comments about one another on small pieces of paper and gave them to the women to read, feel good about and take home and place by the bedside to remind them that they 'are a wonderful person.' To this Helen replied, "I didn't know that I had so many good traits. It

felt so good to hear these things."<sup>10</sup> Knowing that this is a common response, the founder developed motto's to reinforce this:

'You can do it!' is an everyday motto at Blooming Flower Cosmetics. And so often a woman will join us who is in desperate need of hearing this message. Frequently she is a homemaker who has been out of the job market for years. Perhaps she *never* worked outside the home; and now, because of divorce or widowhood, she finds herself seeking a career. Maybe she worked long and hard in another field, never having heard those words of encouragement. For whatever reason, she often needs to build her feelings of self-esteem and worth.<sup>11</sup>

The third way in which Blooming Flower proved to be a positive force in women's lives was through the everyday supportive atmosphere. A culture exists that provides support, a network of new friends, a continual flow of positive feedback, and recognition for effort put forth. This culture originates from the premise that the Golden Rule should be used in doing business. That is, instead of working against each other, as Sharon suggested results from a capitalist system, that the "women should work with one another."<sup>12</sup>

Three core elements of worker relations with Blooming Flower were established and reflect this need to work with one another. One, it is stated that a respect of other Blooming

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<sup>10</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 9 February 1994.

<sup>11</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 8.

<sup>12</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 17 February 1994.



Flower relationships is to be upheld at all costs. That is, if a guest has a beauty consultant from previous experiences with Blooming Flower, the relationship should be honored (i.e., no business should be stolen from other Blooming Flower consultants). This results in building respect for each other and helps foster a non-competitive spirit. In her autobiography, the founder speaks of the need to be competitive **with oneself**, not each other. This non-competitive nature allows the women to be supportive of their own successes as well as helping each toward success. I found this non-competitive spirit to be essential to empowerment for the women involved. Other's success stories often led to the reaction of "If you can do it, I certainly can too!" This was especially apparent with new consultants, as they learned to redefine their ability to achieve success.

Secondly, the 'Dovetail system' exists to help each other out in dire circumstances. This system requires that the consultants help each other out by holding scheduled skin care classes for each other when something happens and the original consultant cannot conduct the class. Fifteen percent of the sales are earned by the consultant who conducts the class, and customers (other than the hostess) who are gained from the experience become those of the replacement consultant. This again fosters a support-based, all-for-one, one-for-all atmosphere. That is, the women feel a sense of security knowing that if something comes up, that they will have

support. It also allows consultants flexibility to deal with life issues as they arise.

Third, the 'Adoptee program' exists which again promotes the culture of sharing responsibility and helping each other out. This program allows consultants the ability to relocate without losing the business, recruits or support that they had in their original location. As a consultant is preparing to move, her director calls and finds a director in the city to which the consultant is moving. When the consultant arrives, she meets with the new director and begins attending weekly sales meetings under the new director, thus securing a new support network and continual training. The original director is still the primary director and continues to collect commissions on what the consultant orders from the company.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, contact is maintained and the director remains responsible for aiding the consultant with primary responsibilities, such as recruiting.

This adoptee system allows consultants to recruit women almost anywhere they find themselves. For example, if a consultant is on vacation and finds that a woman she meets is interested in becoming a Blooming Flower beauty consultant, she can recruit her and set her up with a director in the woman's home town/city. For instance, Laura, one of my key

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<sup>13</sup>The new director does not collect commission on the adoptee's sales. The motivation to provide support and training still exists however, because it is likely that the new director will also have one of her consultants move and utilize another director for support and training.

informants had been recruited by a woman in Milwaukee, but was 'adopted' by Sara and thus attended the unit meetings on the Wednesday nights that I observed.

The idea of 'adoption' stems from the experience that the founder had at a former direct selling company. She (as she notes most women do), had to relocate because her husband got transferred. With this move she lost her territory, and hence all of her business. Another person took over her territory, reaping benefits that she had worked hard to obtain. In order to avoid having other women lose the benefits of hard work, she developed a system that allowed for the possibility of relocation. Through the use of the U.S. mail system and the support from different directors, when women relocate while working within Blooming Flower, they keep their hard earned business.

Additionally, in this culture that Blooming Flower creates, emphasis is placed on making the women feel important, beautiful, competent and special. The use of continual compliments are used to boost confidence and give the consultants a feeling of importance. These compliments are both appearance-based and ability-based. Phrases like "Helen is going to soar, can't you guys [sic] just tell" and "doesn't she look fabulous, you guys [sic]?!" were some of the comments Sara used to make her consultants feel important and

special.<sup>14</sup>

Honoring those that have personal success stories also creates a display of importance and competence. For example, the 'good news segment' discussed in Chapter 3 allows for the expression of issues and happenings in other realms of life as well as Blooming Flower. During this segment the women are asked to stand up and share good news concerning any positive aspect of their lives thus providing a supportive and inclusive environment in which to work. Comments would usually encompass family oriented news and other job successes.

Clapping and congratulatory remarks also serve to make the consultants feel important and special. 'Crow periods' allow for the recognition of deeds done. As a woman stands and shares successes or news concerning her Blooming Flower career, other consultants often offer congratulatory comments. Judy, as an effort of inclusiveness, would often ask women to stand that did not offer any 'crows.' Often women who felt that they had nothing to crow about were asked to crow anyway. In these instances, Judy would ask the consultant if she had sold anything or talked to any potential customers or recruits. In an attempt to find something positive to make her feel good about, Judy often would remark "now **that's** something to be excited about!"

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<sup>14</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 16 February 1994.

The founder's key to success and self-esteem building centers on recognition. She notes:

*Praise people to success!* Let people know that you appreciate them and their performance, and they'll respond by doing even better. Applause and the recognition it represents are among the worlds most powerful forces.<sup>15</sup>

Her idea of praise includes a strict focus on the positive side of things, so that the consultant does not lose confidence or desire to succeed. She advises:

Even though the consultant may have made some drastic mistakes, a wise recruiter will avoid criticism. Especially in the beginning, the consultant needs praise for everything she did *right*.<sup>16</sup>

This type of attitude results in a very positive atmosphere where women are more likely to take chances and try things they may have not otherwise tried.

The positive power of this culture was expressed in many ways. Most prevalent were the good moods that the women, myself included, left the meetings in. Laughing and talking that did not always exist prior to the meetings generally took place after the meeting was officially ended. Additionally, the consultants would stick around and chat afterwards even in light of the time that had passed and the responsibilities that were awaiting them at home. Perhaps even a stronger indicator was the attendance of one consultant, Laura, who showed up nearly every week even though she hadn't sold anything in months. When I approached her about her

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<sup>15</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 158-59.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 165-65.

attendance in spite of her lack of sales activity, she replied that the meetings made her feel good and generally inspired her. These nights were cherished by many, as one consultant put it, 'This is my night!'<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusions

When the founder began the plans for this company, she reflected upon her experience as a saleswoman in another direct selling company. Often times she found herself training men who, once trained, would become her superior or received higher positions than herself. She was also told when giving advice or input, "you're thinking just like a woman."<sup>18</sup> Given this subordinate experience, she decided that her company would be based on the Golden rule and "women would be allowed to pursue unlimited opportunities. No one would be held back if she had the skills and determination to succeed."<sup>19</sup> My five months of observations at Blooming Flower, along with three interviews, demonstrated that the company did provide many experiences and opportunities that had an impact on women and impacted their lives in a good way (hence, proved to be a source of empowerment).

First, the atmosphere that was created was rewarding for most women. As discussed both in Chapter 3, and in the

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<sup>17</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 16 February 1994.

<sup>18</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 27.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, xii.

founder's autobiography, most of the women who join Blooming Flower tend to be in traditional situations. A lot of the women do not have careers other than full-time parenting. Some endured low pay, dead-end retail jobs. Of those that did have careers, some claimed that the money was not as good as they had hoped or in comparison with Blooming Flower, or aspects of the corporate atmosphere were disheartening (e.g., the 'glass ceiling'). Almost all of the consultants claimed they felt recognized, appreciated and rewarded in jobs prior. Judy notes that she appreciates Blooming Flower because it is " . . . nice recognition for work done. I mean, I work harder at other things and you see not even a comment."<sup>20</sup> The personal recognition seemed to be a key reason women found the Blooming Flower experience enjoyable.

One of the most apparent fulfilling experiences was that of feeling special and important. That is, personal attention was a key benefit of the Blooming Flower experience, be it prizes, compliments, or a voice with which she could speak about herself. Perhaps the most blatant example was Laura's attendance despite her sales inactivity. The few references to the sales meeting night as 'their night' were also referring to the rewarding special feeling that they felt as a result of their attendance at the meetings. It is probable that some of the women do not get the attention and

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<sup>20</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

recognition that they may need and/or deserve in other areas of their life. I believe that perhaps these consultants have little importance placed on their words and actions in other realms of their lives, hence their attendance at the meetings. This seems plausible given that most are consumed with the task of raising kids and running the household, both of which are other-focused activities.

The positive supportive culture and continual stream of recognition and compliments also function to increase the chance for success.<sup>21</sup> That is, the more positive a consultant feels about herself and her ability, the more likely she will attempt or secure success. Whether the success is personal (for example, the first smooth running presentation at a skin care and glamour class), or financial (an increased income), the woman achieves things that may not have been achieved otherwise.

The experience with success is what was the most obvious sign of empowerment for women at Blooming Flower. The first form of success was that of increased confidence and self-esteem. That is, all of the women that I came in contact with seemed to experience some increase of self-worth. This self confidence was often the result of learning new skills, or becoming aware of positive characteristics that they did not

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<sup>21</sup>Success here refers to a perceived or actual step in increasing one's personal, social or economic worth. This includes anything that brought a feeling of pride and/or power to the woman as a human being.



know they had. Most prominent was the ability to stand up and claim some sort of knowledge. The examples throughout this chapter and Chapter 3 highlight the struggle with this skill. Judy noted that although it is challenging to be one's own boss, the personal growth that resulted is rewarding:

It's funny, I spent a long time talking to John last night about how I have grown personally. I mean having your own business is confrontive. You can't blame the boss if things go wrong, you can't blame anyone else, but then now no one else takes the credit when things go right. I mean you can get the full recognition and know that in your heart that you did it yourself. Um, it's a wonderful, wonderful sense.<sup>22</sup>

The second form of success is the ability to achieve financial success and/or independence. Women can earn good money working for Blooming Flower Cosmetics. Knowing that they can support or contribute to the support of themselves and their family is an empowering feeling. Being able to contribute in various ways (childrearing **and** significant financial contributions) to the raising of the family is more fulfilling than only contributing in a few ways (only childrearing). Additionally, by establishing a career with Blooming Flower, they are investing in the future. A lot of the consultants and directors have built a career or the potential for a career so that if divorce or widowhood becomes a reality, they have a way of supporting themselves. Often times in traditional family situations where the man is the primary earner, his absence could create chaos and a feeling

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<sup>22</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

of inadequacy as a parent. This chaos is less likely to occur if a financially sound future exists for the woman, as well as the man.

Another aspect of the Blooming Flower experience that appears to be a source of empowerment are the contacts made and friendships formed. Relationships with women are formed and serve to support and aid each other to success. Judy notes:

We're trained how to support each other in a healthy way. I never put it in those words before, but I do think that's exactly what's going on. How do you provide support for someone? You **don't** do it for them. You **don't** get so involved that it pulls you down. Or whatever, you can get so involved and therefore it pulls you up, if someone else is doing well. You need to separate out comparing yourself. Some wonderful skills to learn!<sup>23</sup>

These relationships most probably differ from those formed through day care, neighborhood associations, or jobs, in that they are based or specifically centered on achieving personal and financial success. Support amongst each other was common, since everyone is basically considered a business partner. As Judy states, "There's a support group that's wonderful, and sincere, and honest, and for the most part, non-judgmental."<sup>24</sup> An example of these supportive friendships surfaced one week when Marcia mentioned to Shawna that she would send her some information on a specific technique. Along with the information (which was promptly sent) was a

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<sup>23</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

very touching note that praised Shawna for her positive attitude toward life and success, and Shawna's motivational effect on her. This note was read out loud so that everyone got to take joy in the strength of friendships developed through Blooming Flower. Judy remarked during an interview that she had seen notes sent from one of her consultants to another that say things such as "You did a great job" and "You're real important in my life."<sup>25</sup> Another example of the camaraderie was displayed by Karen when she began inviting other consultants to join her in conducting open houses and luncheons at her home on weekends to attract new customers and show new products to current customers. This offer was generous in that Karen could have conducted the open house alone and reaped all of the benefits herself. It was also generous because she was providing women a chance to do something that they may not have been able to do, i.e., most women did not have homes large enough to have open houses.

The relationships formed through Blooming Flower became key to aiding most women to succeed personally and financially. Not only did these relationships made the struggle of success easier (as seen by the support network and the logistics of how Blooming Flower works), but they also provided a source of networking for current or future needs. In this way, Blooming Flower is an investment in the future since the friendships formed have the potential length of a

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

lifetime.

The fact that women are training other women to obtain a career and increase their self-esteem is empowering as well. There are very few companies that are run by women for women. This woman to woman training and working relationships appears to have two benefits. First, the women can relate to each other better than they can with men because most have experienced similar life dilemmas, as well as have had more interest and contact with beauty related issues. Secondly, this type of uni-gendered contact escapes working within the gender hierarchy. This avoids the chances of inequality in pay and positions, as well as dramatically decreases the chances of declared unworthy, as the founder was in her previous job. I think that women would be less inclined to attempt success with men around and in positions of authority because of the fear of failure.

On a more general level, specific aspects of the structure and workings of Blooming Flower facilitate empowerment as well. In the capitalist sense, and in comparison with other types of work that these women may have experienced, Blooming Flower offers some things that often are absent in other work experiences. Earning 50% of the products sold with additional percentages added for recruiting is more than most women will find working in other companies and industries. With the glass ceiling in place and gender inequality in earnings across western culture, women do not

have the chance for earning large amounts of money or a chance at obtaining prestigious positions. As part of being one's own boss, Blooming Flower claims that "an unlimited earnings potential" exists. It appears that this claim is valid. Blooming Flower claims that they lead more women to succeed than any other company. That is, as stated earlier, more women earn over \$100,000 in Blooming Flower than any other company. It is also claimed three-fourths of all women millionaires work for Blooming Flower. Often times the more financially successful directors end up earning more than their male significant others!

Additionally, fairness is built into the system at Blooming Flower, as everyone starts at the same place. That is, to become a director, everyone starts out as a consultant with her beginning beauty kit. Also, everyone has the same options for unlimited, free training, and all have the opportunity (given all other life factors do not conflict) of earning a car paid for by the company. The receiving rewards for recruiting and selling, appeared to be equally obtainable.

The flexibility at Blooming Flower benefitted and empowered women as well. The benefit of setting one's own hours is also rare to other occupations and industries. The corporate world is not constructed with the parent in mind, and with the consultants being the primary caretakers of the kids and household, this flexibility is an asset. Often women are unable to obtain jobs that pay enough to afford childcare.

It is also possible that women may have missed the opportunity to have had jobs and training that could have strengthened their value on the job market. The flexibility of a Blooming Flower career enables those involved to make money, and be full-time parents. Additionally, the ability to relocate and not lose their time, effort and business is an immense benefit since many women involved with Blooming Flower are the secondary earners of the family and often need to be privy to the primary earner's job.

In sum, from the perspective of obtaining a career and learning skills that build self-esteem, Blooming Flower appears to give women of its sales force experience and skill that they may not have had otherwise. All women appeared to gain confidence in public speaking and in the ability to claim some sort of knowledge. All women appeared to have the wherewithal to begin a career if the time appeared right. However, aspects concerning self-esteem and appearance and their affects on women (as a social group and personally) have not been examined. An examination of these issues reveal effects of disempowerment. These disempowerment issues are discussed in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### BEAUTY AS DISEMPOWERING: CONSTRUCTING THE WORTHY WOMAN

While beauty is often the result of individual action, it is inherently social. It is certainly social in the creation of what is beautiful. One person does not create a new fashion or look. Various factors such as economic situation and changes in conceptions of gender play parts in the creation of the current fashion. Additionally and perhaps more importantly, beauty and appearance is social in that it is dependent on the evaluation by others. The actions and reactions fuel and are often the impetus for action by those who are attempting to achieve beauty.

As discussed in Chapter 1, women as a social group are particularly affected by experiences of beauty. Women have been largely valued as objects to be desired and looked at (for example, *Playboy*, and the college bar scene), are used to sell almost any product or image (consider beer models), and are used to increase the social value and egos of men as well to sell the product to other women. As objects of desire, whether it be sexual desire by men, or a desire by women to achieve a specific body/lifestyle/image, attention to appearance is of primary concern.

Although women actively participate in becoming

beautiful, these are largely other-defined roles, as they hinge upon womens' ability to obtain the current definition of beauty (as largely decided by others), and in some way be evaluated by others as having done so. The actions and reactions of others further validate this securing of beauty (i.e., after the search begins, they are either validated by being 'chosen' as a model or are picked up at a bar, or not validated or 'chosen' or picked up). The processes of this search and evaluation attached to beauty are in part what this chapter examines in an everyday context. In this chapter I discuss the experiences at Blooming Flower that I hypothesize are disempowering to those that exist within, or come in contact with Blooming Flower. A comparison of the Blooming Flower experience with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 shows rather conflicting results. Although the consultants are supported, receive recognition and gain confidence, the underlying assumptions on which these are based are problematic and support the themes in the literature. Three themes in the literature seem prevalent upon analyzing the way beauty is presented to and defined within the Blooming Flower experience and are discussed below.

#### Women as inherently concerned with being beautiful

The objectification of women is an underlying theme that is perpetuated by the workers and literature of Blooming Flower through their definition of what feeling good about oneself as a woman is all about. Blooming Flower begins with



the establishment of the definition of women as inherently concerned with appearance. The defining of women as inherently concerned with appearance at the onset normalizes the gendered concern with appearance. A statement about the nature of women in a beauty book that Blooming Flower distributes illustrates this beauty-oriented definition of women:

Have you ever had a fantasy about what it would be like to be beautiful? Not just attractive. Or cute. Or even pretty. But breathtaking beautiful? Be honest. You've given it some thought haven't you? You and every other woman. We all think about being beautiful. Women always have, and no doubt always will. There's really nothing phenomenal about it. The urge to be beautiful is part of what makes us human.<sup>1</sup>

By defining it as 'natural' or inherently specific to females, this definition serves as a protection or blockade to challenge of the pursuit of beauty as anything but normal for women. One such example is the use of the phrase 'being put together' by one of my informants. She defined this as being well groomed (hair clean and styled), wearing make-up and wearing the 'right' clothing. To ignore these things is to not be 'put together,' and thus out of the ordinary or unprepared. Often, to not focus on appearance or be concerned with appearance becomes defined as unwomanly or implies a sense of incompleteness. This inability to fulfill the requirements of womanhood (i.e., paying attention to, and altering appearance) affects social and self worth, as

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<sup>1</sup>Beauty, 4.

consequences exist for not making appearance a central concern.

One of the consequences for women for not being concerned with appearance is not being taken seriously. In her discussion of being 'put together,' Laura highlights what not to do to be taken seriously by a boss:

Maybe you've been led to believe that people are going to take you more seriously if you've got all your ducks in a row, if you've got it all put together um, then they'll take you seriously. But if you go in there and it looks like you haven't washed your hair, you've got it pulled back in a ponytail, you have um, you know, you have on a pair of pants that don't feel comfortable, you have on a sweater that is kinda loose and baggy and doesn't flatter your figure at all. And you're going to go into your boss and tell them that you're not happy with your job, or that things need to change (laughs), or that you want communication to be better, and you're going to go in there looking like, like you've just been cleaning the bathroom or something . . . <sup>2</sup>

Through this normalization, attention to appearance is reaffirmed as a primary means by which women can capture and hold attention, and thus validate themselves as socially worthy. The phrase 'skin is an asset' put forth in Blooming Flowers beauty book demonstrates this type of thinking. This process of validation or being deemed socially worthy is apparent in a story of an informants transition from being a non-make-up wearer to becoming a Blooming Flower consultant. She noted that as her career began and she started to wear make-up, she noticed a dramatic difference in the reactions of people to her. She recalled going to pick up her car at the

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<sup>2</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 27 February 1994.

mechanics with make-up on. She remarked that she "received much more respect than I did without make-up." She went on to say that people treated her "more professionally and seriously" with make-up on than they did without make-up.<sup>3</sup>

Another telling example of the link between beauty and validation for women exists in the 'bible' of Blooming Flower--the autobiography of the founder. In her autobiography, the founder tells the story of being contacted by a woman interested in obtaining material for a book on self-made American women. The founder noted that "her credentials were impressive" as she had a Ph.D. As the founder was waiting for the arrival of this woman (known as Dr. Smith), she "spotted a dreadful-looking woman approaching":

She was wearing a pair of slacks, a short sleeved shirt and some sneaker type shoes. She had a masculine haircut, wore no make-up and really looked as if she should have been out gardening.<sup>4</sup>

The founder reacted by telling her receptionist "For heavens sake, get that woman out of here before Dr. Smith arrives." Her receptionist replied moments later, after approaching the woman, "that *is* Dr. Smith." The meeting began with the founder, her key business assistant, Jim, and Dr. Smith, but the founder noted:

Jim spent a total of five minutes with that woman before he politely excused himself. He could have contributed immensely to her research, but he was so turned off by her

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<sup>3</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 7 February 1994.

<sup>4</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 115.

appearance that he didn't want to give her the time of day.<sup>5</sup>

This situation is exemplary in illustrating one of the disempowering aspects of the importance placed on appearance. Such importance often becomes a criteria by which womens' value is judged.<sup>6</sup> In the above example, Dr. Smith's value as a person was solely based on her outer appearance, as judged by others. Although her credentials 'looked good,' she did not adhere to the culturally created conceptions of what a woman should be oriented toward and in active pursuit of (make-up, 'correct' dress, 'feminine' hairstyle), thus her worth as a human and as a woman was negated. In this example, Dr. Smith's chances for success were decreased solely because of her appearance.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps even more problematic is the ability of this type of reaction to be considered 'normal' by many. The founder normalizes her and her business assistant's reaction by stating that part of succeeding as a woman is to achieve beauty:

He had lost his respect for her when he saw how carelessly she was dressed. No matter what you do, or how restricted your time, you should always make the effort to look your

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>6</sup>It should be noted that women also participate and contribute to the valuing of women by appearance, as this example points out.

<sup>7</sup>I imagine that this was also the case with my presence as a non-made-up researcher. My appearance perhaps made me less of a threat, but also made me a target as having 'potential.'

best. I think it makes sense for a woman to try to have everything going for her.<sup>8</sup>

The founder's adherence to the definition of woman as inherently concerned with appearance allows her to matter-of-factly assert that what happened to Dr. Smith was a "good lesson," thus agreeing with the manner in which Dr. Smith was treated.<sup>9</sup> It also allows the link between success and appearance for women to appear "normal" and "valid."

Along with social worth of a woman being based on how much importance is placed on the attainment of beauty, personal worth becomes associated with outer appearance as well. Instances such as those above teach women or perpetuate in women that their self-worth is based on how they appear on the outside. Identity is then established by determining one's self and social worth according to how one appears on the outside. Confidence in this sense becomes intimately tied to outer appearance. Laura, using her concept of being 'put together,' noted the connection between appearance and feeling confident:

. . . if your skin is in bad condition, or you have a break out or something, you're nervous about that and you worry about that. I think when you're put together and, and you are put together and you look especially put together, you don't have to worry about these things anymore because you've already done the task and now you are ready to go, ready to take on what you have to do.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 27 February 1994.

This connection between self-worth and outer appearance is exemplified by a quote from a chapter called "Looking good and Feeling great" in the founder's autobiography: "When a woman feels that she looks good, she simply radiates self-esteem."<sup>11</sup> In other words, self-esteem is largely dependent on outer appearance.

Blooming Flower's conception of beauty, originating from the founder, makes a direct link between a woman's self-esteem and her appearance. Blooming Flower defines beauty as two parts, inner beauty and outer beauty. Inner beauty is a general happiness involving self-esteem and self-respect, while outer beauty is physical appearance. It is determined that both are pertinent for happiness and positive self-worth, and as such a strong connection exists between the two. It is a primary assumption that achieving outer beauty will enhance and greatly affect inner beauty, or how one feels about oneself. Blooming Flower declares that the road to beauty begins when one grasps the idea that--"if you look good, you feel good." One consultant used this ideology when speaking about her conception of beauty. Hearing that I was researching beauty, Jennifer offered:

You wanna know what I think beauty is?! It's inner beauty. But, I feel most beautiful when I do my hair, put on make-up, and dress professionally. I mean, if I just sit around the house all day in my pajamas and don't put on make-up or anything, I don't feel beautiful. I feel confident when

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<sup>11</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 127.

I'm like this. I feel strong.<sup>12</sup>

This premise of 'feeling good is looking good' plays a strong role in all of Blooming Flower's processes. In fact, this a primary marketing technique of Blooming Flowers. For example, every consultant I observed in a class, as well as those who asked me about my experience at the classes and photo shoot, asked the guests and myself in a statement format 'Didn't it feel great?!' or 'how do you feel' or 'Don't you feel great?!'

The photo shoot was one such Blooming Flower event that existed to reinforce the ability of make-up to transform how a woman felt about herself. 'Before' and 'after' pictures were taken to highlight this transformation. Increased positive recognition by others was guaranteed as everyone, especially the consultants, showered the participants with compliments as they made themselves up, emphasizing the drastic difference in appearance at the end of the night. I participated in a photo shoot to understand what the experience of becoming beautiful in the eyes of Blooming Flowers involved. As the glamour process ensued, and Judy guided me through the steps, she became really excited and showed signs of being very pleased. She remarked several times, "Gosh, Colleen, I can't believe it." When I had completed the glamour part and was ready for my 'after'

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<sup>12</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 11 February 1994.

picture Judy said to me, "Colleen, you're going to pick up guys on the bus on the way home!"<sup>13</sup> By pointing this out, Judy was implying that through the use of make-up I had become an object of male desire and without it I was not. Translated, this statement means that my social worth had increased as my appearance honed in on embracing ideal. This was reinforced by the fact that the only times that I received compliments from Judy were the times that I wore make-up.<sup>14</sup>

The compliments, while meant as an attempt to have the women feel good about themselves, can also be seen as serving to perpetuate the definition of the worth of women as beautiful objects by telling them that they are valuable through comments about their appearance. This was most apparent one night at a weekly sales meeting. At this meeting Sara, the director of this meeting, sat down and let Helen stand and do the 'good news segment' because she had sold the most merchandise the week prior. Sara proceeded to shower Helen with compliments about how good she looked. She mentioned twice that they were all 'gonna sit back and admire how great Helen looked.' This sounds empowering because it is positive feedback, however it is completely based on an outer appearance which is fluid and can reinforce the association of feeling bad or insecure when one feels they look bad on the

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<sup>13</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 1 March 1994.

<sup>14</sup>This experience revealed how common conceptions of beauty are centered around an heterosexual orientation.



outside. In this way, compliments were a tool that perpetuated the link between self-esteem and outer appearance.

Through the use of statements such as 'don't you feel great?!", a direct connection is made between general happiness and outer appearance, hence supporting the worth=beauty equation by attaching feelings about oneself to what condition the outer appearance is in. This is problematic in that it perpetuates the creation of an identity based on how successful a woman has been in securing the 'correct' appearance, and whether that woman has been judged as having done so. The problematic nature of the linkage becomes especially apparent when analyzing the implications within the statement "if you look good, you feel good." The converse reads "if you don't look good, you don't feel good." This highlights the danger in relying on appearance as a major part of one's identity. During an interview, one of my informants replied to an inquiry of a day when she felt least beautiful:

. . . there was one day where I just threw on some clothes and went to work, didn't really care what I looked like, what I was wearing and you know, just generally a bad attitude, and I didn't feel very confident, wasn't very happy.<sup>15</sup>

In Jennifer's quote about what beauty is (see page 7), she linked her mood for the day to how she appeared on the outside. Appearance in these examples appears to be a

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<sup>15</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 27 February 1994.

powerful determinant in the setting of moods, confidence and sense of self-worth. The fluidity of appearance when directly linked and strongly tied to self-esteem and identity can be very powerful. An example of its power is found in a response from one of my informants to a question of whether there are days that she does not wear make-up:

Not in terms of putting on the make-up. I put the make-up on everyday, no matter if I'm with my boyfriend or even home alone cause I never know, for one thing, when someone's coming over. I also know that I feel better about myself when I have my make-up on.<sup>16</sup>

In an effort to understand how deep this connection to a made-up look was, I asked "How does it feel without make-up on?" To this she replied:

I know that I don't have make-up on, I know that I'm not as good to look at cause I need make-up, cause I've seen the 'before' and 'after' pictures (laughs). I know what I look like without the make-up--it's not a pleasant sight (laughs).<sup>17</sup>

The link of self-esteem to appearance for women appears to create a sporadic sense of feeling good about oneself, with the fluctuation dependent on how and if make-up is applied. This results in a self-esteem that is created out of jars and compacts and dependent on others evaluations, instead of being firmly based within the actual person. Confidence and self-esteem based on something more concrete, and less fluid and other-determined such as mental ability, would result in a

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<sup>16</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 17 March 1994.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

stronger person and/or identity as it would result in less fluctuation in how one felt about oneself, since mental ability is not something that is put on and taken off.

### Problematizing the female face

The second theme found in the Blooming Flower experience to be disempowering is the defining of specific features, looks and skin conditions as problematic or in need of fixing. The assumption underlying the selling, application techniques, and products of Blooming Flower is that women **need** the make-up or skin care products. By defining certain facial features or skin conditions as problematic, Blooming Flower consultants imply that certain ways of looking are bad or wrong and others are good or right. While this may be a terrific method for creating a need for their product and securing sales, using techniques and products that define beauty with a certain ideal in mind can have serious implications for women as a social group, and their self-esteem.

The definition of women as inherently concerned with appearance and wanting to be considered desirable to others involves defining women as in need of make-up.<sup>18</sup> The examination of some basic definitions and assumptions, as well as the products and techniques, highlight the problematizing of the female face and reveal the apparent assumption that women need make-up to be considered desirable, and thus worthy

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<sup>18</sup>The need to do this for business reasons is absent from this discussion as it necessitates additional research.

of attention and value.

One instance where this is apparent is in the beauty book that Blooming Flower distributes for the explanation of the beautification and maintenance of the female face, hair and nails. The book notes:

Beauty isn't so much a question of time and money as it is commitment. An ongoing commitment to fulfill your potential.<sup>19</sup>

The use of the phrase 'fulfill your potential,' teaches women that in some sense transformation is necessary to succeed. The use of the word 'fulfill' assumes a process to achieve the desired end, highlighting the need to transform, while the use of the word 'potential' infers that attention to appearance is natural or inherently normal for women implying that is what should be strived for. This is further demonstrated in the sentence following the one stated above: "Take this opportunity to evaluate your efforts and redefine your goals."<sup>20</sup> This assumption and perpetuation of the idea that women need to transform is what this section will examine within Blooming Flower.

The examination of certain phrases that Blooming Flower consultants used during my study demonstrates the ability of Blooming Flower to make the face appear problematic. For example, the use of metaphors comparing facial features or bodily processes to other 'natural' features or processes

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<sup>19</sup>*Beauty*, 9.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

worked to define the problematizing of the female face as normal and natural. One such metaphor appeared in a skin care and glamour class that a specific consultant held. In order to bring the concept of skin care and glamour down to an everyday level and make it seem a normal concern, Marcia used the comparison of the unprotected face to an old barn. She noted that there was a need to 'protect the skin from environmental elements.' She compared the unprotected face to a barn with an old weathered faded-paint look to it. She remarked: "Without primer, the barn becomes old and faded by the sun, the same is true for the unprotected face." Later in the class she repeated the need for protection by using the metaphor of a car rusting to describe the skins potential damage from the elements.<sup>21</sup>

Metaphoric examples surfaced in Judy's discussion of the need for foundation at the skin care and glamour class I held for reciprocities sake with my friends and colleagues. After soliciting [negative] comments about the use of foundation, Judy decided to use a painter's canvas to bring the use of foundation into everyday context. She said, "this is similar to a painter painting the canvas one color in order to obtain an even base coat on which to paint a perfect picture."<sup>22</sup>

Blooming Flower consultants were also able to develop a

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<sup>21</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 17 February 1994.

<sup>22</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 16 March 1994.

sense of concern, and hence a definition of the face as in need of transformation, through the use of 'facts.' Marcia, in her skin care and glamour class, added bits of information that exacerbated and helped to create a need for concern about appearance. To reiterate the need to use caution with the skin around the eyes, she shared "blinking stresses the skin around the eyes." Additionally, she pointed out that "not washing your face at night will age your face 3 to 14 years," thus stating that washing the face at night is essential in staying younger longer.<sup>23</sup> The beauty book that is distributed also participates in making the face seem problematic. For instance, it states if the face is not washed in the morning as well as the night "your face may appear dull or waxy."<sup>24</sup>

Lastly and perhaps most telling is the often reiterated statement that Judy and the beauty book use to develop a need for the product and for transformation: "You only have one face for the rest of your life."<sup>25</sup> All of these statements make concern about one's face seem very normal. They also create and reinforce an atmosphere of concern that breeds in strength according to the intensity of connection between self-esteem and social worth with appearance. The physical surroundings at Blooming Flower events tend to also reinforce

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<sup>23</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 17 February 1994.

<sup>24</sup>*Beauty*, 33.

<sup>25</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 16 March 1994.

that concern with 'problems' involving the face is 'normal,' as many other women are listening, sampling, and buying the products.

Specific techniques depend on and aid in the defining of certain features or conditions of the face as problematic. One pervasive technique was centered on dealing with the development of wrinkles. As Judy led our class through skin care, she gave instructions to always brush any cleanser, moisturizer and/or make-up upward since this is "the opposite of the way we want our skin to grow," noting the fear of sagging skin. Concerning the eye area, she told everyone to use the ring finger, since it is the weakest finger. The procedure involved doing inward circles starting from the top of the eye around to the bottom area of the eye to avoid adding additional wrinkles to the eye area. She added that the muscle around the eye grows in that direction, so that to do an outward sweep underneath the eye would pull the skin away from the muscle, and hence result in additional wrinkles.<sup>26</sup>

Many techniques and products are dependent on the definition of age for women as problematic. Blooming Flower's beauty book presents age as a dilemma, but notes it is a manageable dilemma:

Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Whether you've already experienced the undeniable moment of truth, or if you've yet to notice signs of aging around your eyes and mouth, across your forehead and along your jawline, it's time to face reality. There's no turning back the clock. Current

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

research seems to indicate, however, that many of the changes that were once thought to be inevitable can be postponed.<sup>27</sup>

This battle against 'the natural' sets in place a lifelong struggle for women to literally continually define themselves as in need of fixing. The face becomes both a site for struggle, and a battling ground on which the products become the tools with which the battle is fought.

Once concern for the face has been established and specific features and conditions have been defined as problematic, Blooming Flower presents an ideal look for which they feel women should strive. Blooming Flower terms this ideal look as having 'classic proportions':

Perfectly symmetrical, ideally proportioned. Whether you're aware of it or not, classic proportions are your point of comparison.<sup>28</sup>

The use of this 'classic proportions' theory was demonstrated at a skin care and glamour class when a guest inquired about her eye shape. The guest asked the consultant how to deal with the skin on her eye bone that overshadowed the rest of her eyelid. The consultant replied by telling her to put the main color of eye shadow a bit higher, covering part of the eye bone. The consultant called this problem 'the hooded eye problem' and found a remedy through eye shadow to fix it.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Beauty, 34.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>29</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 17 February 1994.



Products and techniques are continually offered to 'fix' problems that women may have concerning features of their faces or skin conditions, thus helping women obtain a look of 'classic proportions.' For instance, highlighter can "make cheekbones more prominent, draw attention to eye area, add fullness to a narrow face, minimize a full jowl, give a flat nose a more sculptured appearance, [and] bring a receding chin forward."<sup>30</sup> Through the use of foundation one can contour by creating shadows. This contouring can "slenderize a wide nose, minimize a long chin, shorten a high forehead, [and] make a wide face appear narrower."<sup>31</sup>

Lip liner is another product that assisted in problem solving as well. At one class, a consultant asked "Who here feels that their lips are too big?" Amy, a sixteen year old, replied that she 'definitely felt that her lips were too big.' The consultant then asked if anyone felt that their lips were too small. The consultant, who was Amy's mother, stated that this can be "fixed by putting lip liner just outside the lip line to get your lips to appear bigger, or just inside the lip line for a smaller lip."<sup>32</sup>

Blush had transformative abilities as well. One consultant demonstrated at a photo shoot that blush could

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<sup>30</sup>Beauty, 129-30.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 131-32.

<sup>32</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 17 February 1994.

'correct' an unbalanced facial shape. During the glamour process, an oriental woman named Mary (described in Chapter 3) was told that her cheekbones needed to be made 'less prominent.' At the same time, I was told my cheekbones needed to be made 'more prominent.'<sup>33</sup> By placing blush *underneath* my cheekbones, I could highlight my cheekbones, while placing blush *directly on* Mary's cheekbones, she could underscore her cheekbones. Through these techniques we could achieve a more balanced face.

#### Perpetuation of the gender hierarchy

The third issue that tends to dictate disempowerment is the way in which women are encouraged to stay in roles that do not facilitate a self-defining situation for themselves. That is, aspects of the Blooming Flower experience perpetuate the gender hierarchy. One way in which Blooming Flower perpetuates this disempowered position is through their definition about the assumed responsibilities of women. Blooming Flower has a slogan (discussed in Chapter 4) that they feel women should follow in order to obtain success and happiness--'God first, family second and career third.' This statement defines women in roles that are focused on things other than herself. That is, it fails to make herself as an individual a priority. In the above statement the only self-defining role is placed as least important. However, within

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<sup>33</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 1 March 1994.

a career with Blooming Flower, that role tends to be other-focused as well. In a chapter entitled "Happiness is . . . " the founder states "The basis for our entire philosophy has always been that it's better to give than to receive."<sup>34</sup>

This assumption that women should act selflessly is disempowering and serves to perpetuate the gender hierarchy. That is, by placing more importance and value on others needs and wants than on their own, they enable others to design their lifestyles according to their own needs as a person, while not following the same course of action themselves. This is gendered in that this often results in more importance placed on the woman's spouses wants and needs. It is in this enabling that focus and worth of one's own needs gets lost, thus disempowering themselves in the process. A vivid picture of the perpetuation of traditional hierarchical roles and expectations exists in one of Blooming Flowers training videos. In this video, Blooming Flower supports and perpetuates the gender hierarchy by showing a scene in which a potential recruit is told that if her husband disagrees with her choice to do Blooming Flower, then the contract will be ripped up. This is sending the message that what their husbands want is more important than what the specific woman wants. It also implies that the male should remain the primary decision maker, even over matters concerning his spouse's career.

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<sup>34</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 139.

One way this selfless role puts women in a position where disempowerment could result is by Blooming Flowers requirement for women, especially the directors, to be perma positive/happy nearly all of the time. Since the job necessitates support, recognition and motivation, a very upbeat attitude is key to facilitating financial growth for oneself and for those that work underneath her. Although such activities such as the 'good news segment' and 'crow periods' exist to give women a voice and recognition to other aspects of their life, this voice is limited to only positive happenings. Judy summed this requirement for positive attitude:

. . . there's a real strong emphasis at the meetings on being positive. Leave your negativity at home please, it'll be there when you get back (chuckles).<sup>35</sup>

The founder takes this need to hide the negative feelings even further by advising that the negativity should be absent from the home as well:

While it's good to have your family involved in your career, you must be careful not to bring your problems home to them. Sometimes people make the mistake of discussing every little conflict at the dinner table, and this only serves to upset the family.<sup>36</sup>

This perma positive attitude teaches women to deny themselves any feelings which may result in anything less than a positive mood. Having primary responsibility for the kids and home,

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<sup>35</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

<sup>36</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 83.

along with potential partial financial responsibility is not without hardships. By denying expression of hardships it creates an atmosphere which sends the message that womens' hardships aren't worthy of attention. This denial of feelings misrepresents the actual picture of many womens' lives. Through structuring the discourse in such a way as to only include the positives in life, it is denying them voice. The message is that it is okay for women to over function for others at the expense of herself. The denial of hardships insures that changes will not be made.

### Conclusions

This chapter has examined the ways in which the assumptions, actions and reactions of Blooming Flower consultants create disempowering definitions and atmospheres for women. This disempowerment develops and breeds as a result of conceptions of women furthered by the founder and everyday actions, goals and objectives of Blooming Flower.

One of the major assumptions that contributes to the disempowerment of women is the assumption that women are inherently concerned with appearance. This assumption is problematic for several reasons. First, it creates a world in which women spend a good portion of their time and money trying to achieve beauty (read worth).<sup>37</sup> This constant search

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<sup>37</sup>As suggested in Chapter 1, Research from 1993 indicates that \$10 billion is spent each year on cosmetics and skin care products (*Psychology Today*, 1993).

for the adoption of a changing conception of beauty reinforces and aides in perpetuating the definition of women as object. Second and inherent to the idea of women as object, is the dependence on the actions and reactions of others (usually men) to determine whether they had achieved the desired level of beauty. This is dangerous because it holds women in a position where others define their worth. This other-focused definition of self and identification of an object to be admired and to base how one feels inside is exemplified by the recommended last step of the glamour application process. Here, the women are told to hold the mirror at arms length so that they can understand how they look to others. This is then used as the criteria on which decisions of whether changes need to be made to the face is based.

Through this identification of women as inherently being concerned with appearance, Blooming Flower links success for women with the ability to achieve beauty. This definition rewards women when attention is paid to appearance and when the face is made-up. This was apparent in nearly all of Blooming Flower events. For example, incredible amounts of positive recognition are given to those who use the prescribed methods to obtain a specific constructed appearance. The link with success is stated directly by Blooming Flower through their slogan "If you look good, you feel good." The second aspect of this statement reads: "If you feel good, you will do good." This link with success has several serious

implications for women.

First, it defines beauty as the major criteria for women to achieve worth in this society. This link of worth with appearance results in self-esteem being largely dependent on womens' ability to achieve beauty. Confidence and positive self-worth become intimately tied to how and if make-up is applied. Blooming Flower's founder describes how feeling bad and feeling good are linked to appearance:

a tremendous change comes over a woman when she looks good and knows it. And when she *doesn't* look good, she *doesn't* feel good about herself. Suppose a woman is in the middle of baking a cake and discovers she's out of cinnamon. She's in jeans, her hair is rolled up, her face isn't made up, and she knows she looks terrible . . . let's say that same woman is on the way home from a wedding, knowing she looks her very best. If she meets someone then, she has an entirely different attitude. She'll radiate confidence. There's no question that a woman who looks prettier on the outside will feel more self-assured.<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, the unfortunate focus of attention to appearance and the stated need for the use of cosmetics is the need to transform. The implication here is that what originally existed (the un-made up face) is wrong. This need for transformation implies a non-acceptance of the unmanipulated face, and is demonstrated in the following statement found in Blooming Flower's beauty book:

It's not what you have to work with that counts, but how you work with what you have.<sup>39</sup>

By defining women as in need of transformation, they are

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<sup>38</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 133-34.

<sup>39</sup>*Beauty*, 126.

teaching women to dislike themselves. One result is demonstrated in a comment by the founder's mother during a visit: "Darling, would you fix my face?"<sup>40</sup> A continual theme exists that appears to be telling women that they need to look otherwise. The beauty book solidifies this assumption:

The funny thing about makeup is that when we're young we wear it to look older and when we're older we wear it to look younger.<sup>41</sup>

This need to look otherwise puts women in a position of insecurity as one action (for example, not putting make-up on), can lead to feeling bad about oneself.

Third, if women are socially valued according to their ability to grasp the beauty ideal, then those that grasp it are valued, while those that do not, are not. It privileges few and defines them as more worthy than others, so that those who are born with 'balanced' facial features will find themselves privileged and highly valued. What this means is that those who might tend to have larger noses (for example, Eastern European or African American women) or those that may tend to have fuller lips (for example, Mediterranean or African American women) will find themselves told to look otherwise. This results in defining other races and ethnicities as problematic, as the idea of 'balanced' features is created from one using one ethnicities facial shape--White or Caucasian American. One example of this use of an

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<sup>40</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 128.

<sup>41</sup>*Beauty*, 143.



Caucasian American as the ideal is found in Mary's experience at a photo shoot (described in this chapter and Chapter 3). By showing Mary how to make her nose more 'apparent' through the use of make-up the consultant is implying that noses must be a certain type--prominent (read 'Caucasian American'). This is sending the message to Mary that her nose is wrong and needs fixing. This encourages self-hatred, creates a self-esteem based on another's ethnicity (White or Caucasian American), and can result in hatred of specific ethnic groups.

In sum, perhaps the most disempowering aspect of all in the Blooming Flower experience is that Blooming Flower does not examine the implications of stated links between self-esteem, social worth, and appearance. By not questioning these links and their effects on women, they support and perpetuate disempowerment. Additionally, by providing an environment in which only positive things are shared and negative feelings are muted, they keep women in denial of a reality that needs not only a voice, but an avenue for change. And lastly, by placing a woman's career last in a series of priorities, it assures that "My husband says I've gotta cut back" can remain a common response.<sup>42</sup> Until women are allowed a lifestyle that places primary importance on themselves as people and not as caretakers, and until they are sent messages that no matter what they look like, they will be valued, they

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<sup>42</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 13 April 1994.

will remain in disempowered positions.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The literature notes that beauty is disempowering for the majority of women because it often results in women being valued as objects of adornment. Additionally, the focus on attainment of beauty teaches them that they are deficient, encouraging self-hatred of their bodies and faces. It is through cultural messages, images and everyday interaction, that beauty becomes of 'paramount importance' for it represents for women a value 'worth more than power, wealth or fame' (Lakoff and Scherr 1984:3). This attachment of importance to appearance often translates in success or social worth for women being largely dependent on attainment of a culturally determined ideal of beauty. It appears that the role appearance plays in terms of social worth is extremely different across genders.

Examples of the connection between gender, appearance and access to power are ubiquitous. For instance, an overweight bald/balding man can gain instant social worth by having a beautiful woman on his arm or by merely speaking (Rush Limbaugh), while an overweight, balding woman would have to have a connection to wealth or a prestigious man to even begin

to gain social acceptance. Differences in age and appearance expectations of anchormen and anchorwomen also demonstrate this gendered difference in importance of appearance. Wolf (1991) notes:

The message of the news team, not hard to read, is that a powerful man is an individual, whether that individuality is expressed in asymmetrical features, lines, gray hair, hairpieces, baldness, bulbousness, tubbiness, facial tics, or a wattled neck; and that this maturity is part of his power. If a single standard were applied equally to men as to women in TV journalism, most of the men would be unemployed. But the women beside them need youth and beauty to enter the same soundstage. Youth and beauty, covered in solid makeup . . . . (34).

An examination of cultural images reveals that beautiful women and their bodies add worth to sports cars, men, showroom prizes (e.g., The Price is Right), jewelry, beer, cigarettes, *Sports Illustrated* issues, men's cologne, etc. (see appendix 3). An assumption seems to exist in advertisements that both genders are expected to feel more compelled to purchase a product or participate in an activity if it is associated with a beautiful woman. Often, if the ad is targeted toward women, the promise of attainment of ideal beauty exists, the end goal being increased personal and social worth. If one is a heterosexual man, the attainment of the attention of a young beautiful woman is often indirectly implied, offering the possibility of increasing his social worth. It is through

messages such as these that women have learned to rely on outer appearance to obtain attention, success, and acceptance. It is this often unquestioned, unexamined gendering of social worth that drove my decision to research what beauty means for women.

Those that have chosen to study and research the politics of appearance have mostly sought to prove that it is in fact a contributor to women's oppression. Others have looked for ways in which this importance attached to appearance for women permeates our society (e.g., advertisements). Few have looked at how it permeates women's everyday lives and how women make sense of the importance of appearance and beauty. I chose to research at Blooming Flower Cosmetics because it is an arena in which beauty is the primary focus. For the women involved with Blooming Flower, becoming beautiful was an everyday occurrence both for personal reasons and for business reasons. Experiencing and participating in the lives of women selling cosmetics assured that the process of, and creation and negotiation of the meaning of beauty would be the focus of this study.

Participation, observation and interviewing not only allowed the roots and relations of "Blooming Flower beauty" to be understood, but also revealed three overall conclusions which contribute to both the beauty literature and sociology. First, the study of the creation and process of beauty at Blooming Flower revealed complexities. More specifically, a

contradiction surfaced surrounding issues of economic and social success and issues of empowerment. Economic success for women who were otherwise unskilled, unsure of themselves, and/or undervalued is combined with teaching women that success and personal and social worth was in fact linked with appearance and that Blooming Flower products were necessary to be beautiful and to "fulfill your potential" as women.<sup>1</sup> These two dynamics create an arena in which self-affirmation is intertwined with aspects of self-hatred. For many women, Blooming Flower provides them a "chance of a lifetime" to earn money, gain recognition, gain skills, and in doing so, increase self-esteem.<sup>2</sup> One sales director even claims that because of these empowering effects, she and Blooming Flower have done more than most feminists have for the women's movement. Using her philosophy of "stop talking and act," she notes:

I listened to Gloria Steinem rant and rave, and at the same time I watched Blooming Flower [sic] doing something--starting a company. Paying women what they're worth. All of this screaming and demanding is setting women back.<sup>3</sup>

While a significant positive gain does exist for most women selling Blooming Flower cosmetics, aspects of disempowerment exist for women on a larger level, both

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<sup>1</sup>*Beauty*, 9.

<sup>2</sup>Field Notes, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 1 March 1994.

<sup>3</sup>"A former also-ran discovers blush with success as No. 1 at Blooming Flower [pseud]," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 December 1994, sec. C, 3.

personally and as a social group. The use of words and phrases such as "fix my face" and instances of "correcting" ethnic noses reinforce elements of self-hatred.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Blooming Flower ardently reinforces the connection between women's self-esteem and social worth with outer appearance, making womens' feelings about themselves extremely dependent on outer appearance. In this sense, "If you look good, you feel good" is a marketing ploy that markets insecurity among women.

A focus on male acceptance also underlies Blooming Flowers reasoning for attention to appearance. The founder of the company advises:

When a woman behaves like a lady, she sets the stage, and as a result, men will conduct themselves as gentlemen. If I know that I will be the only woman present . . . I go out of my way to dress extra attractively that day. I find that men respect a woman who trains her femininity, and that they respond more favorably to her if she presents an attractive appearance.<sup>5</sup>

This focus on a need for make-up to feel good about oneself and to gain acceptance from men reifies a concept of woman which relies on an other-focused, fluid sense of self in which women label themselves broken on the outside, hence unvaluable.

The literature on beauty often portrays beauty as simple-disempowering to women. The complex web of increased empowerment woven into the disempowering aspects of the

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<sup>4</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 128.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.

Blooming Flower experience attaches a *realness* to womens' experience with beauty. That is, negotiations takes place to create a place where women struggle and work to define what it means to be a woman. Positives are intermixed with perpetuation of, or an acceptance of other potential negatives. This realness mirrors what women have always experienced within the gender hierarchy. Struggles to grasp independence, respect and equality are often laden with contradictions, and beauty participates in these contradictions. Foltyn (1989) notes in her study of beautiful women, "I have found that being beautiful is an exaggerated and paradoxical female experience, fraught with distinct privileges and problems, revealing of such larger social issues as the larger social issues as the formation of identity, gender role socialization, and trends in mass society . . . " (viii). I believe that this study demonstrates that complexity exists with issues of womens' empowerment and beauty, thus making beauty a more tenable issue.

Second, the focus on the everyday world of beauty allowed for an avenue in which to examine aspects of womanhood and femininity. Key to the grappling of empowerment issues in this study was the discovery of the importance of femininity in conceptions of women and beauty. It is my contention that in order to better understand and work to change womens' location within the gender hierarchy, and the connection



between femininity and beauty. A specific definition of femininity underlies the definition of beauty that Blooming Flower puts forth.

Blooming Flower promoted a concept of femininity that defined women in disempowering ways. One strong example of this appeared in a story of a "miracle" being performed through the use of cosmetics in the founder's autobiography. In her autobiography, the founder tells a story of a man calling her and thanking her for saving his marriage. He explains:

My wife and I have been married for eight years, and when we first met, she looked like something right out of *Vogue* magazine. She had every hair in place, a beautiful face, and a fabulous figure. Then she became pregnant and was sick for the entire nine months. She lost all interest in her appearance . . . .

. . . She never combed her hair, and she never made up her face. When I'd come home at night, the only thing that would have changed was that it was worse!<sup>6</sup>

He explained that his wife had attended a Blooming Flower beauty show and purchased twenty-eight dollars' worth of cosmetics. He continues:

. . . the woman who sold it to her really did a good job . . . she fixed her face . . . When she got home that night, she looked *terrific*! It had been so long since I had seen her looking that way that I had forgotten how beautiful she really was. And the best part is that she now fixes her face and hair and gets dressed every morning. Besides that, she's lost twelve pounds; and I've got my old girl back. I've fallen in love with her all over again, and it's all because of you!<sup>7</sup>

The founder concludes "the same miracle has probably been

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<sup>6</sup>*Blooming Flower*, 51-2.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

repeated thousands of times."<sup>8</sup> In this example, the wife's worth and the marriages worth was reduced to how the woman appeared on the outside. For both the man and the founder of the company appearing beautiful is key to femininity and worth as women. Combining the use of cosmetics with this need to appear beautiful creates a mandate for need to look otherwise. Brownmiller (1984) sums up the damaging effects of such a view by defining femininity to be " . . . a grand collection of compromises, large and small, that simply must make in order to render herself a successful woman" (16). Through the promotion of this definition of femininity, a constant element of insecurity exists among women who adhere to this type of femininity--an insecurity that is highly dependent on others acceptance to [temporarily] eradicate it. Most often this acceptance or illacceptance is awaited from the male gender, revealing the role of femininity in the reification of the gender hierarchy. In sum, this study reveals the connection of beauty to the gender hierarchy by exposing a key link: conceptions of femininity.

Third, this examination of beauty in an everyday context allowed the concept of agency to enter the arena of beauty and women. Corrigan (1992) explains that "gender identity is an actively mediated subject-position rather than the simple outcome of objective forces imposed from without and passively absorbed by the human equivalent of a **tabula rasa** or lump of

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

plasticine" (113). This study provides a window in which women actively utilize concepts of beauty to organize and make sense of their lives and identities as women. For instance, Laura actively utilizes her ideas of how particular levels of appearance varied with the situation. I asked her if her actions and attitudes surrounding beauty differ on the weekends and among work and play. She described her weekend behavior:

. . . I guess I feel more relaxed [concerning application of make-up] unless I'm going out to go out and see people . . . I tend to, if I am going out socially, to make sure that I'm, I've done my make-up, I've done something that makes myself look put together . . . You know, there are some social environments that all the women wouldn't dare to be caught dead [wearing make-up] . . . if I am going to see the Grateful Dead.<sup>9</sup>

She went on to describe that around her family " . . . [I] abandon a lot of my routine . . . I don't feel that I have to dress a certain way or act a certain way."<sup>10</sup> This study allowed the humanness to reenter an arena that is often described in a top down structuralist manner. I believe this study highlights the role of agency with women and issues surrounding appearance.

### Conclusion

An uncritical glance at our society reveals a focus on appearance by women. A more critical look reveals that "Men

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<sup>9</sup>Recorded Interview, Blooming Flower Cosmetics, Chicago, IL, 27 February 1994.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

act, women appear" (Berger 1972 in Foltyn 1989:76). I contend that beauty and appearance is one area which tends to remain overlooked as a contributor to the gender hierarchy. For this reason, issues of empowerment and disempowerment for women concerning beauty were the focus of this study.

This study provided a window in which to view the effects of the unquestioned/unchallenged belief that women are, and should be inherently concerned with appearance. As such, I believe this study exposed the need to challenge assumptions surrounding femininity. My research reveals that Blooming Flower is an institution that leaves femininity unquestioned.

This study sought to inform the area of beauty and women by adding what the literature has neglected--research with a focus on the everyday. What was not studied and could make the concept of empowerment more "real" are womens' perceptions of their abilities and mobility as it relates to appearance. Additionally, in-depth interviews surrounding what femininity is and how it participates in helping women define themselves and their conceptions of beauty would give my research added validity. Nevertheless, this study presents the foundation from which additional research can take place involving empowerment and femininity.

## APPENDIX 1

### GLAMOUR APPLICATION

#### inside beauty

the photoaging effects of the sun — including wrinkles, lines and dryness.

To help sooth the puffiness-prone eye area, Eye Cream Concentrate provides much-needed comfort as it minimizes the appearance of fine lines and crepiness. We reminded Martha to always use the ring finger — and a very gentle touch — when applying products to this delicate area.

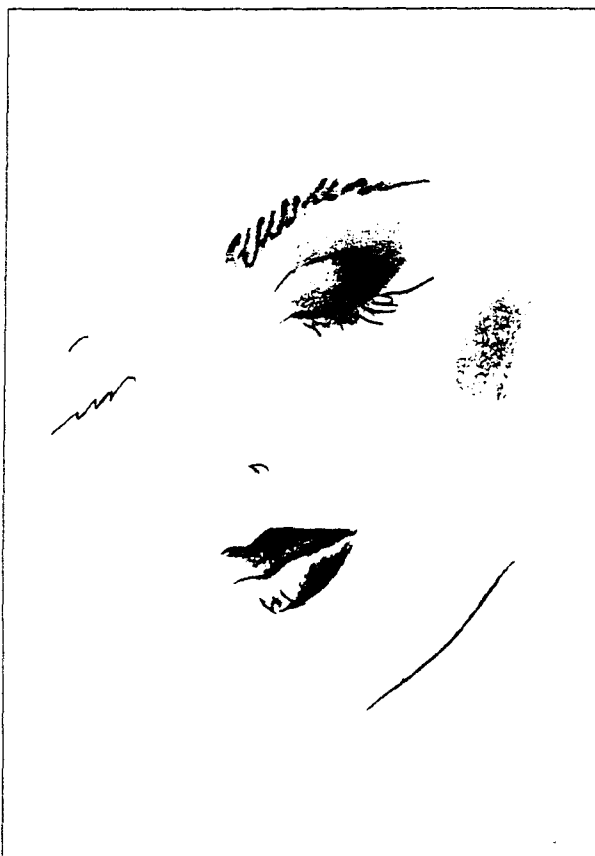
Next, we turned our attention to glamour makeup and the natural look Martha wanted to achieve. With mature skin, certain enhancers are a must: concealer, to hide dark circles and lines; foundation, to even out any discoloration and perfect skin; and a light dusting of loose powder, to eliminate shine and give skin a polished effect. We also blended Spice creamy cheek color along the cheekbone to give her skin a radiant yet realistic glow.

To continue with this less-is-more approach, we used subtle shades on Martha's eyes — Apricot Cream and Tuxedo Brown eye shadows, Sable eye defining pencil and Brown mascara. And for the lips, Raisin lip liner pencil and Toffee lipstick are soft, flattering neutrals that blend beautifully with Martha's personal coloring and harmonize with all wardrobe shades.

We also took into account Martha's medium contrast level — the combination of auburn hair

**Cheek color:** Spice  
**Eyebrow pencil:** Light Brown  
**Eye colors:** Apricot Cream,  
 Tuxedo Brown  
**Eye defining pencil:** Sable  
**Mascara:** Brown  
**Lip liner pencil:** Raisin  
**Lipstick:** Toffee  
**Nail Color:** Sienna

and medium skin — to make additional shade recommendations. Other good choices in the warm family include Apricot or Cashmere blusher with Ginger Pearl or Pumpkin lip colors. Or with cool wardrobe colors, she might opt for Wild Rose or Orchid blusher with Plum or Mauve Elegance lipstick.



APPENDIX 2  
THE PHOTO SHOOT

BEFORE



AFTER

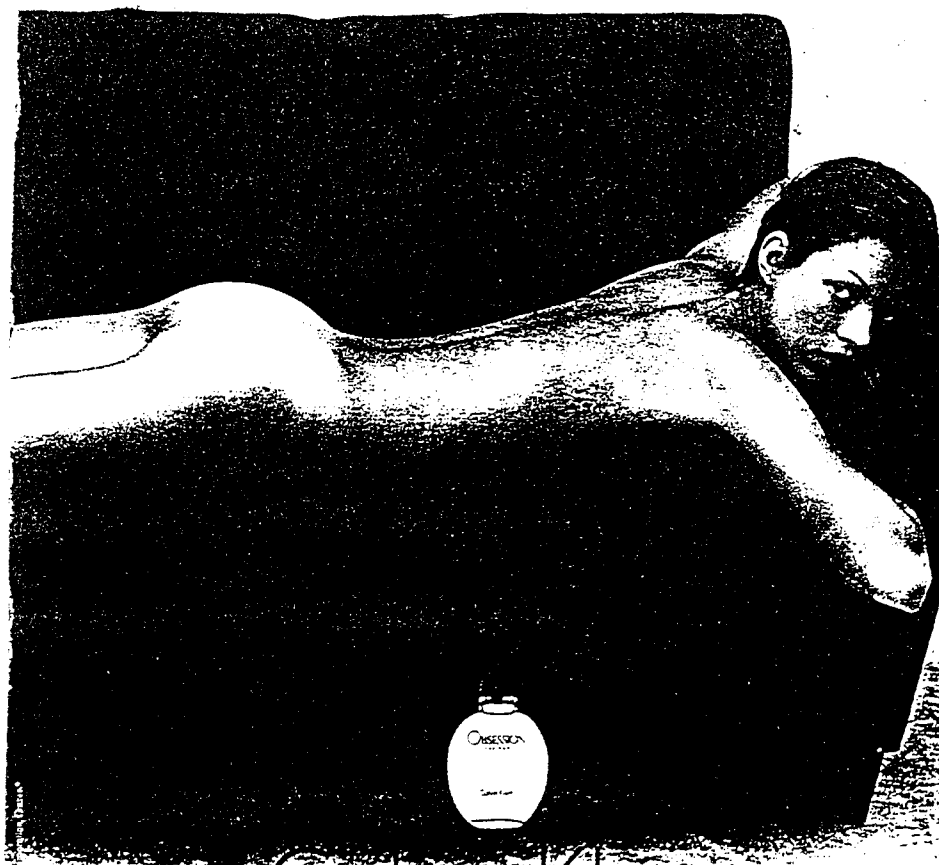


## APPENDIX 3

## ADVERTISEMENTS

# OBSESSION

for men



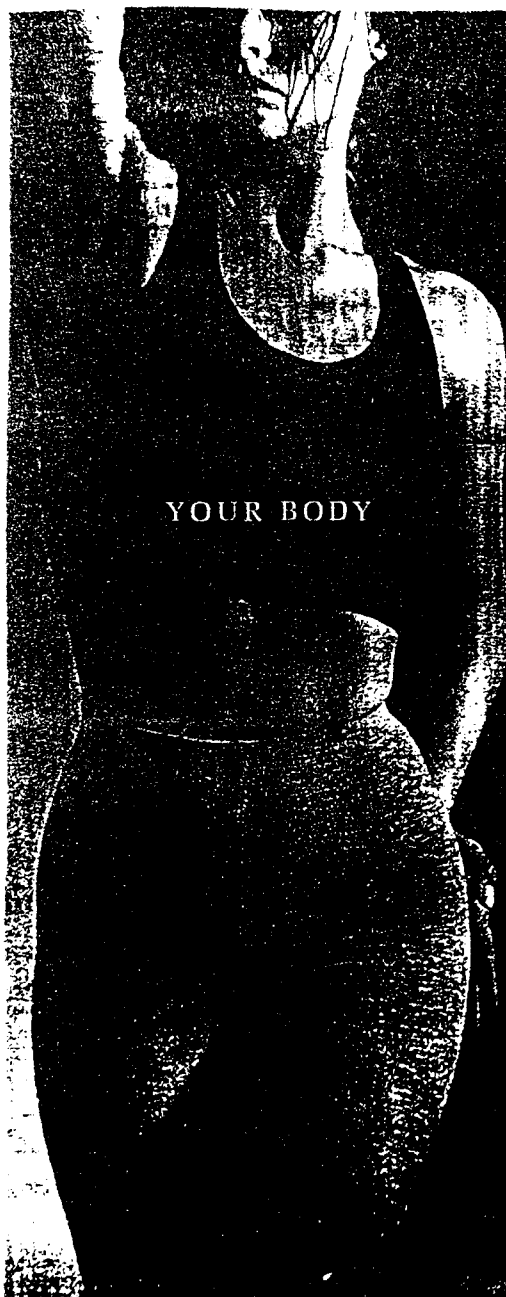
Calvin Klein

eau de toilette

Macy's/Bullock's

*Cosmopolitan*, March 1994.


APPENDIX 3  
ADVERTISEMENTS



YOUR BODY

OUR BODY

RESEARCH MEDICAL  
BAPTIST  
TRINITY LUTHERAN  
MENORAH MEDICAL CENTER  
MENORAH PARK  
MEDICAL CENTER OF INDEPENDENCE  
LEE'S SUMMIT  
RESEARCH BELTON  
CANS COUNTY  
10,000 people  
LAFAYETTE REGIONAL  
working together  
RESEARCH PSYCHIATRIC  
to deliver one promise.  
ALLEN COUNTY  
To be the system  
REHAB INSTITUTE  
that creates a secure future.



HEALTH MIDWEST

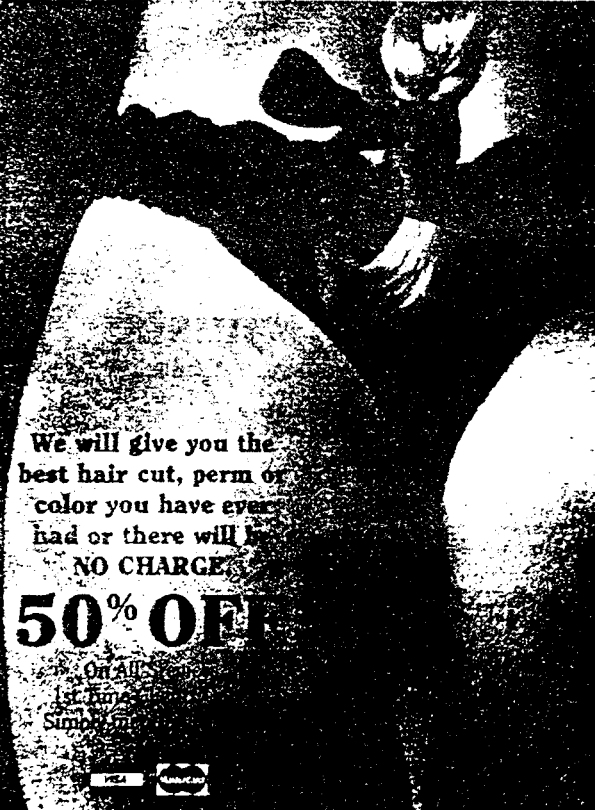
The Kansas City Star, 17 January 1995, A7.



## APPENDIX 3

## ADVERTISEMENTS

**LARIMER SQUARE HAIR**  
**1415 Larimer Square 623-5500**  
 Between Ann Taylor's & Talbot's



We will give you the  
 best hair cut, perm or  
 color you have ever  
 had or there will be  
**NO CHARGE.**  
**50% OFF**  
 On All  
 1st Time  
 Services

Services cut &  
 Blow-dry  
 Reg. \$25-40  
 1/2 Price  
 \$12.50-\$15

Mens cut &  
 Blow-dry  
 Reg. \$20  
 1/2 Price \$10

U.S.O Perms  
 world's only  
 long lasting  
 damaging  
 free perm  
 Reg. \$50 & Up  
 1/2 Price  
 \$25 & Up

All over Color  
 "Frames color"  
 Reg. \$30  
 1/2 Price  
 \$15 & Up

Full Frostings  
 Reg. \$50  
 1/2 Price  
 \$25 & Up

Manicures,  
 Pedicures,  
 Sculpture Nails &  
 many other ser-  
 vices all 1/2  
 price on your  
 first visit

We are open  
 7 days a  
 week &  
 evenings.

\$500 hour  
 parking behind  
 Salon at  
 Larimer Sq.  
 Parking,  
 1421 Market

**accentuate  
 yourself**



**Nomadic Notions**  
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**9264 Metcalf • 642-3131**

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The thesis submitted by Colleen Carpenter has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.

4/5/95

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